

VELOCITY: IT RULES THE GAME P. 60 / HOW HITTERS CAN HIT BACK P. 70

MLB PREVIEW '15

MARCH 30, 2015

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DOUBLE ISSUE



WAIT TILL THIS YEAR

WHY CLEVELAND? WHY *NOT*
CLEVELAND? WHY THE TRIBE WILL
WIN ITS FIRST SERIES SINCE 1948

PLUS

WHY THE BRYCE HARPER HATE?

BY TOM VERDUCCI P. 82

38 PAGES OF SCOUTING REPORTS

EQUATION FOR A TITLE:
MVP CANDIDATE MICHAEL
BRANTLEY (RIGHT)
PLUS CY YOUNG WINNER
COREY KLUBER

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ROBERT BECK
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March Gladness

As the first week's games showed once again, there is one event in sports that never fails to deliver

By Michael Rosenberg



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Steve Nash

Look at the best point guards today, and you'll see the influence of a man who reimagined pro basketball offense

By Lee Jenkins

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FOR MARCH 30, 2015



SI
DIGITAL BONUS



Spring Has Sprung

From the SI Vault
April 10, 1978

It's Opening Day, so buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack, remember to hold the label up and tell me, Who's on First?

By Frank Deford

To read this and other stories from the *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* archive, go to SI.com/vault



Oh, So Sweet

Be honest, you didn't see this coming. Maybe you had No. 1 seeds Kentucky, Duke and Wisconsin all making it to the Sweet 16. But eighth-seeded N.C. State downing top seed Villanova to advance in the East? UCLA, a No. 11 seed with 13 losses, taking out No. 6 SMU... on a goaltending call? Wichita State beating Kansas for the first time in 28 years? Utah's Coach K heading for a showdown with the Coach K? Who'd a thunk it? For a look at how these teams beat the odds, plus complete Sweet 16 coverage, go to SI.com/college-basketball

SI.COM'S Top Stories

1 Hurley's Return

For a roundup of last week's most popular stories on SI.com—including Pete Thamel's feature on former Duke star **Bobby Hurley**, who returned to the NCAA tournament as the second-year coach of Buffalo—go to SI.com/topstories



2 The Seeker

Håkan Andersson is the key to the Red Wings' success

3 Flameouts

NFL free-agency busts are now more common than ever

4 Last Transaction Hero

Alonzo Gee is on his seventh NBA team in eight months

5 Cubs Advantage

Why rookie slugger Kris Bryant won't play on Opening Day



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With Basketball Throwdown on the FanNation fantasy sports app, you can challenge your friends for cash prizes or just for bragging rights. Go to fannation.si.com to pick three NBA players from three teams and see who beats his projection.



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Sports Illustrated

We asked SI's most reliable hoops thinkers: What was your one shining moment from last weekend?



LUKE WINN

Hearing a reserve for 16th-seeded Hampton yell defiantly, "They ain't that big!" upon getting his first glimpse of Kentucky.



MAGGIE GRAY

When Georgia State coach Ron Hunter fell off his rolling stool after his son, R.J., hit the game-winning trey to beat Baylor.



ANDY DEGORY

Watching Wichita State's guards run circles around Kansas was awesome. The Shockers are a tough group of dudes.



TRISHA BLACKMAR

The soaring block Notre Dame's Pat Connaughton had against Butler—especially knowing he can also throw a 96-mph fastball.



KELVIN C. BIAS

As an Arizona alum, I'm glad the Wildcats didn't lose in the opening rounds, given all the upsets. I hope I didn't just jinx them!



KENNEDY BYXBEE

It was exciting to see the Pac-12 go 7 for 8 on the opening weekend and place three dangerous teams in the Sweet 16.

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INBOX

FOR MARCH 16, 2015



I'm not sure which is worse: the idea that the coaches at **North Carolina** had an inkling of the academic fraud and did nothing about it or that they had absolutely no knowledge for over a quarter of a century.

Richard L. Pacelle Jr., Knoxville, Tenn.

The obvious answer to how Carolina lost its way is simple. Rabid boosters spend enormous amounts of money to get the best athletes. The sham courses at UNC, and at almost every other school with an elite basketball or football program, are an almost inevitable result.

Vic Presutti, Dayton, Ohio

Isn't it interesting that in the NCAA tournament North Carolina, a school where many athletes got credit for classes that they did not attend, played Harvard, a school known for its academic excellence and integrity.

Robert Speights, San Diego

While I'm not making light of the Tar Heels' academic scandal, I'm also not going to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The Carolina Way is not the 3,100 students who cheated or those who helped them. Yes, the scandal tarnishes the school's reputation, but it doesn't change what the rest of the student body and academic community are about.

Ginny Brown, Raleigh



COVER

I was nodding in agreement with S.L. Price on what went wrong at North Carolina—until I looked down at your **Kentucky** cover, then glanced at the \$1 billion NCAA tournament on my television. That's when it dawned on me: We are all complicit in this faux notion of the student-athlete.

Mark J. O'Brien, Tampa



PAGES
17 & 26

SCORECARD

Thank you for the articles on **Mike Tyson** and **George Foreman**. I think the brains of these former pugilists need to be studied because despite all of the blows they took to the head, both appear to be getting wiser with age.

David J. Gross
St. Augustine, Fla.



PAGE
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DAN PATRICK

Adam Carolla thinks comedians should play a role in the NFL broadcast booth? He must have missed *Monday Night Football's* Dennis Miller experiment. Rodney Braun Bowmanville, Ont.

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1
of
3**Leading
Off**

Up and Umbra

■ Wichita State junior guard Ron Baker lofted a runner over Indiana guard Nick Zeisloft—and, thanks to a single-strobe light, helped create a cool hieroglyph on the court—during their NCAA tournament round-of-64 matchup last Friday in Omaha. Baker finished with 15 points in the Shockers' 81-76 victory, then scored 12 two days later in a 78-65 upset of second-seeded Kansas (page 40).

PHOTOGRAPH BY
GREG NELSON
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED





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**Leading
Off**

That Cat In the Cats

■ Kentucky point guard Andrew Harrison split high-flying Cincinnati defenders Gary Clark (11) and Coreontae DeBerry (22) and found a wide-open Willie Cauley-Stein during their round-of-32 game last Saturday in Louisville. After a slow start, Harrison and the top-seeded Wildcats blasted the Bearcats 64-51.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAVID E. KLUTHO
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED





+

3 of 3

**Leading
Off**

Basket Hanging

■ UC Irvine center Mamadou Ndiaye caught his breath—and two hands full of net, flat-footed—as his teammates took on Louisville at the other end of the court last Friday in Seattle. Ndiaye, a 7' 6" sophomore from Senegal and the tallest player in the NCAA tournament, had 12 points and five rebounds in the Anteaters' 57-55 loss. Louisville went on to beat Northern Iowa to advance to the Sweet 16.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
**JOHN W.
MCDONOUGH**

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

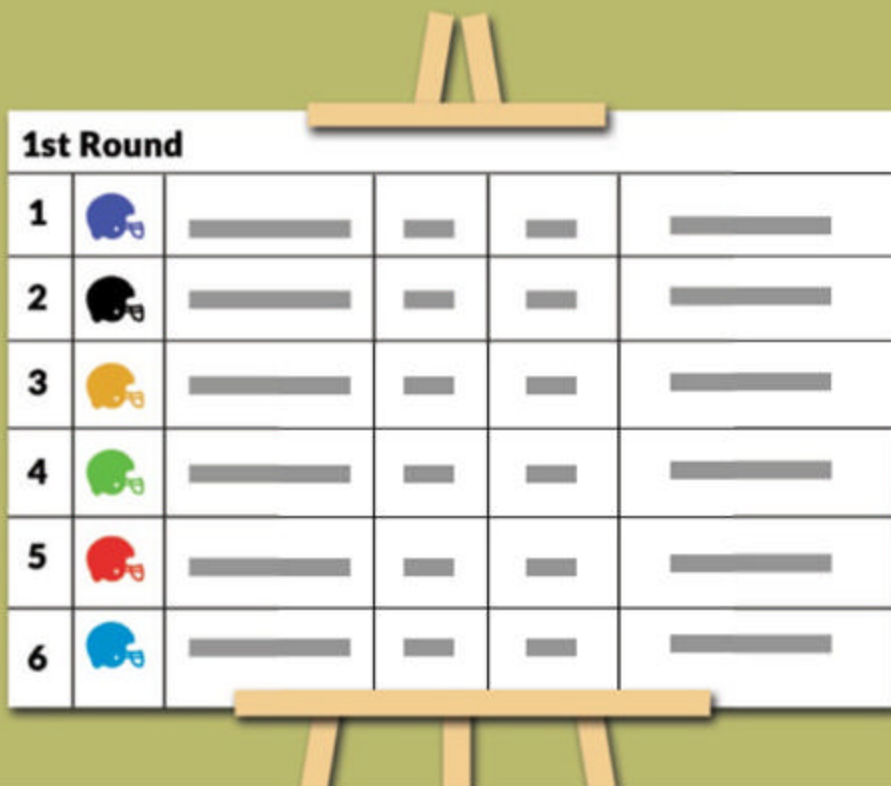
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Edited by JIM GORANT + TED KEITH

SCORECARD



AS HE WEIGHS

Pete Rose's petition for reinstatement—his first official filing in more than a decade—new MLB commissioner Rob Manfred has said, “I want to make sure I understand all of the details of the Dowd Report and commissioner [Bart] Giamatti's decision and the agreement that was ultimately reached.”

A reasonable approach, though it is unlikely that Manfred will find anything new or illuminative in those documents. While managing the Reds in the 1980s, Rose wagered chronically and recklessly on his own and other baseball teams. He had also bet, in a less aggressive fashion, as a player. He brought gamblers closer to the inner workings of the game than anyone could want them. He fell into debt. And on Aug. 23, 1989, after he was exposed, Rose signed an agreement with Giamatti that deemed the Hit King “permanently ineligible” from participating in MLB. Not much wiggle room.

A better way for Manfred to reconsider Rose's fate would be to focus less on what happened then—or in the many years of

The Next Step

[Pete Rose's application for reinstatement has reached the new commissioner, who needs to focus on the future, not the past](#)

BY KOSTYA KENNEDY

Rose's hot denials, followed by self-serving admissions—and more on what might happen next. The case for letting Rose back into baseball rests on a few central beliefs: 1) It is what the people want (and despite a formidable minority of naysayers, that is true, both in and out of the game); 2) Rose, who was as devoted a great player as baseball has ever known, could be a valuable ambassador for the game; and 3) If Manfred puts the right conditions on reinstatement, no harm will come.

Conditions? Sure. Rose now works up to 20 days a month in Las Vegas, signing autographs at a memorabilia shop at the Mandalay Bay Hotel & Casino. It is a lucrative job and one that the garrulous Rose enjoys, although the location makes it easy for him to continue wagering on horse racing and other sports. (There is no indication that he bets on baseball.)

Would baseball allow Rose to continue his autograph work in Vegas, where he is under contract through 2017? Would baseball allow him to go to the horse or dog tracks on his day off? It shouldn't. And if MLB did impose such restrictions, would Rose then balk at coming back? He does want to return—baseball remains the love of his life—but not at great cost to his paycheck or his lifestyle.

If Rose were back in the game, what would he do? "The only full-time job I could take on the field is as a manager," Rose told me last summer. "You can't be a coach and make the kind of money I need to live the way that I want to live." But managing won't happen. While he had a winning record with the Reds (412–373), Rose will be 74 on April 14 and hasn't been in the dugout in 25 years. A club

advisory position of some sort (with Cincinnati) might fly, but reinstatement is more likely to lead to gigs as a spring training instructor and appearances at fanfests and charity banquets, including those around induction weekend at the Hall of Fame.

Ah, yes, the Hall. Manfred plays no direct role in running that organization, but by current guidelines a reinstated Rose would be eligible for consideration by the Expansion Era Committee, which next meets in December 2016 to decide inductees for '17. That 16-person group is composed of Hall of Famers, executives and media members, and a candidate needs 12 votes to get in. Of course the Hall's board of directors could pass an exception, allowing Rose to appear immediately on the regular writers' ballot. It was, remember, the board that arbitrarily removed Rose from consideration in 1991, and while it could have put him back at any time, the members are far more likely to take such a step if Rose has been reinstated.

The question of what to do about Pete Rose is now in its fifth commissionership, dating to Peter Ueberroth. And Manfred will proceed according to his own time line, even as the July 14 All-Star Game in Cincinnati looms. To his credit, Manfred has been open to change—a pitch clock?—and as he renders judgment on Rose, he should think primarily about what tomorrow might bring. Over the quarter century of Rose's exile, the message of zero tolerance for betting on baseball has been unequivocally sent. Forgiveness, as Gandhi said, is an attribute of the strong.

Kostya Kennedy is the author of Pete Rose: An American Dilemma.

GO FIGURE

1

Times this season the **76ers** have been favored to win a game. Philadelphia was expected to beat the Knicks last Friday and delivered, winning 97–81 at Wells Fargo Center.



\$70 million

Amount Wilson Sporting Goods paid to acquire **Louisville Slugger**. Hillerich & Bradsby, which has made the bats for more than 130 years, will continue to produce the official bat of MLB.

43 Years since the **Maple Leafs** had played a Saturday night game in the regular season that did not air on the CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada*—until last week. Toronto, which has the second-fewest points in the Eastern Conference, lost at Ottawa 5–3.



13

Age of Ashima Shiraishi of New York City, who became the first female to climb a 5.15a rock climbing route, the third-highest degree of difficulty in the sport, which she did at Spain's Open Your Mind Direct route on March 17.



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THE HALL OF FAME

center/linebacker Chuck Bednarik, who died last Saturday at 89, didn't simply live and play football in another time; he was wholly and unmistakably of that time—a Greatest Generation soldier, a 60-minute man and an unrepentant defender of the era that he defined and which in turn defined him.

Born in Bethlehem, Pa., Bednarik enlisted in the Army before finishing high school. Between August 1944 and April '45, he flew 30 bombing missions over Germany, manning a .50 caliber machine gun, and each safe landing was a fresh lease on life. In a '93 *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* profile of Bednarik, John Schullian wrote, "... he did what he did after every mission, good or bad. He lit a cigarette and headed for the briefing room, where there was always a bottle on the table. 'I was 18, 19 years old,' he says, 'and I was drinking that damn whiskey straight.'"

Bednarik went from the war to Penn, where he was a two-time All-America, and then spent 14 seasons with the Eagles, playing both ways—center and middle linebacker—



Chuck Bednarik

1925–2015

for the first seven and parts of the last seven, making All-Pro eight times as a linebacker.

But Bednarik's influence can't be reduced to biographical records. At 6' 3" and 235 pounds, he was quick-footed and powerful in the era that preceded weight training (and steroids), and earned a reputation for crushing hits and intimidation. He is best remembered for two plays from Phila-

delphia's 1960 NFL championship season. On Nov. 20 he took down Giants halfback Frank Gifford with a hit to the chest that left Gifford concussed and caused him to miss the entire 1961 season. A month later in the NFL title game at Franklin Field, Bednarik tackled Jim Taylor of the Packers in the closing seconds, then lay on top of Taylor until time expired before saying, "You can get up now, the game's over."

The game was never really over for Bednarik. Into his 80s he remained the go-to source for criticism of the modern, pampered athlete. It was a role he earned with his body and soul, speaking in the voice of his generation.

—Tim Layden

THEY SAID IT

"Ballers make plays. Dudes are dudes. I mean, that's the way life works."

Matthew Driscoll

North Florida coach, with his team leading Robert Morris by six at the half. The Ospreys lost 81-77.

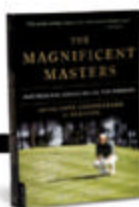


The Middle School Rules Of Brian Urlacher

Told by Sean Jensen

Linebacker's wonder years retold for a YA crowd. Quick read with lots of anecdotes but little attempt to draw life lessons.

#daBears



The Magnificent Masters

Gil Capps

It's 1975 in Augusta, with Jack Nicklaus, Johnny Miller and Tom Weiskopf trading blows over the back nine on Sunday. Tense, detailed, fun.

#18majors



The Secret Game

Scott Ellsworth

Fascinating, well-researched account of a hush-hush 1943 hoops showdown between an all-black college and white all-stars.

#socialchange



Knuckleball

Lew Freedman

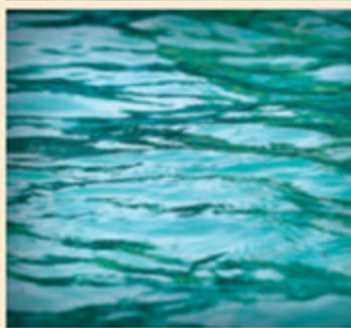
History of the pitch dips into all the characters and kookiness but can leave a yearning for a deeper, wonkier dive.

#fingertips



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Acting The Part

NFL



Jim Brown Browns Hall of Fame back has 53 credits, including everything from the classic movie *The Dirty Dozen* to the forgettable TV show *T.J. Hooker*.
Bonus Fact Member of three Halls of Fame (NFL, college football, lacrosse).

MLB



Chuck Connors Had a cup o' joe as a first baseman with the Dodgers and the Cubs before amassing 134 credits, the most famous being the title role in *The Rifleman*.
Bonus Fact The 6' 5" Connors also played for the Celtics from 1946 to '48.

CFB



Mark Harmon Former UCLA quarterback counts leading roles in *St. Elsewhere* and *NCIS* among his 78 credits. His mother, Elyse Knox, was an actor, as is his wife, Pam Dawber.
Bonus Fact His father, Tom, won the 1940 Heisman at Michigan.

NHL



Cam Neely Bruins wing has nine credits, all minor roles, four of them in Farrelly brothers' movies (both *Dumb and Dumber* films; *Me, Myself & Irene*; and *Stuck on You*).
Bonus Fact Good friend Michael J. Fox emceed his retirement ceremony in 1997.

SKATEBOARD



Jason Lee After dropping out of high school, he spent seven years on the pro skater circuit before turning to acting, in which he has 56 credits, including the lead role in *My Name Is Earl*.
Bonus Fact Skateboarded in the Sonic Youth video for "100%."

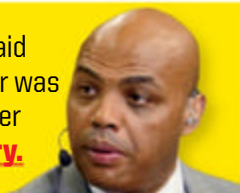
OLYMPICS



Johnny Weissmuller A five-time gold-medal-winning swimmer, Weissmuller racked up 37 credits and became Hollywood's first speaking Tarzan.
Bonus Fact A recording of the famous Tarzan yell, which he created, was played as he was lowered into his grave in 1984.

**SIGN OF THE
APOCALYPSE**

CBS analyst Charles Barkley said Kansas forward Cliff Alexander was playing "pretty good." Alexander **has been out since February.**



BREAKOUT PERFORMER

HOT

Kris Bryant

Top 3B prospect has hit eight homers in 10 spring games, ensuring he'll start in Triple A to delay free agency. Oh, you Cubs.

Chris Borland

Retiring 49ers LB returning 75% of signing bonus, retaining brain cells.

Tim Tebow

Visited Manny Pacquiao's camp, making him the celebrity foil of Floyd Mayweather flunky Justin Bieber.

Stephen Strasburg

Nats ace misses two starts with ingrown toenail and sore ankle. The agony of the feet.

Marcus Smart

Celtics PG suspended one game for low blow to Spurs F Matt Bonner. The losing is making Boston go nuts.

NOT



A SERIES
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SCORECARD

Long Haul

Former Bengals tight end Tony McGee is still handling precious cargo and delivering it to the end zone

BY DAN GREENE

WHEN PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES amble off the field for good, their decadeslong sense of purpose often fades as well. At that juncture, says former Bengals tight end Tony McGee, they can be sorted into three strata: those with nothing going on, those with too much going on and those who have their futures all figured out.

When McGee, 43, hung up his cleats in early 2004, he imagined himself in that rarefied last group. His evidence: a gig with ESPN's *Cold Pizza* and a sports radio talk show in Orlando, where he also held stakes in a restaurant and a sports complex. Soon he learned that he was really in with the spread-thin lot. "When you have all this stuff going on, you can't concentrate on any one thing," says McGee, still fit at 6' 4" and 220 pounds, over chicken tacos at a lakeside Orlando restaurant. "I was the quintessential jack-of-all, master of none."

And so McGee's business interests became more streamlined and efficient, until streamlining and efficiency became his business. Four years ago he founded and became the CEO of HNM Global Logistics, which connects those who move freight (trucking companies, airliners, rail transporters) with clients whose freight needs to be moved, getting it from one place to another as painlessly as possible. HNM's Orlando headquarters is attached to a 30,000-square-foot warehouse lined with white boxes stacked high on orange metal frames, one of four similar facilities currently owned or leased by HNM. It's a far cry from the 500-square-foot office 12 miles away, where McGee took his first steps in an industry he learned of during a chance dinner conversation. "I just figured it out," he says of those early days. "You get on the phone, start calling, networking,

+ Driven to Succeed
McGee tried everything from talk radio to roofing before striking paydirt with HNM Global Logistics.

tapping your resources. . . . You don't think why or how. It's just: I gotta get this done."

If none of this was in his original plans, neither was an NFL career. McGee grew up in Terre Haute, Ind., and like many a young Hoosier fancied himself a basketball player, even earning scholarship offers from Indiana and Pitt, among others. But as an undersized post player, McGee knew his prospects were brighter on the gridiron. He accepted a scholarship from Michigan, where he played tight end and studied communications. For his first three years, however, McGee spent most fall Saturdays as just another spectator. "When you have four catches going into your senior year," says McGee, "you're not trying to sign an agent."

Then things changed. In 1992, McGee was second on the Wolverines with 38 receptions for 467 yards and six touchdowns, including two in a 38–31 win over

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BREAKING NEWS

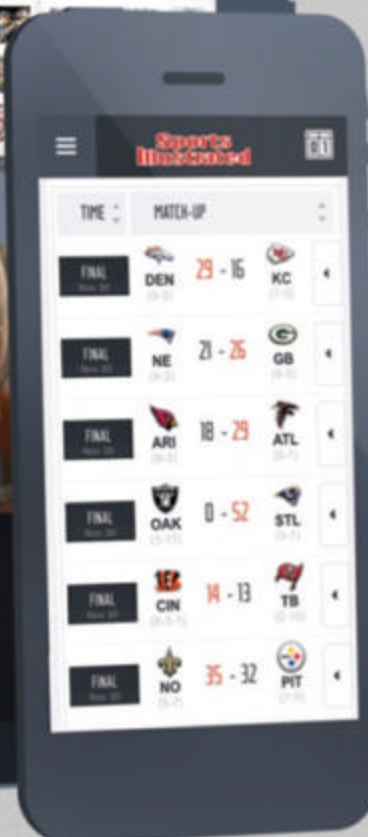
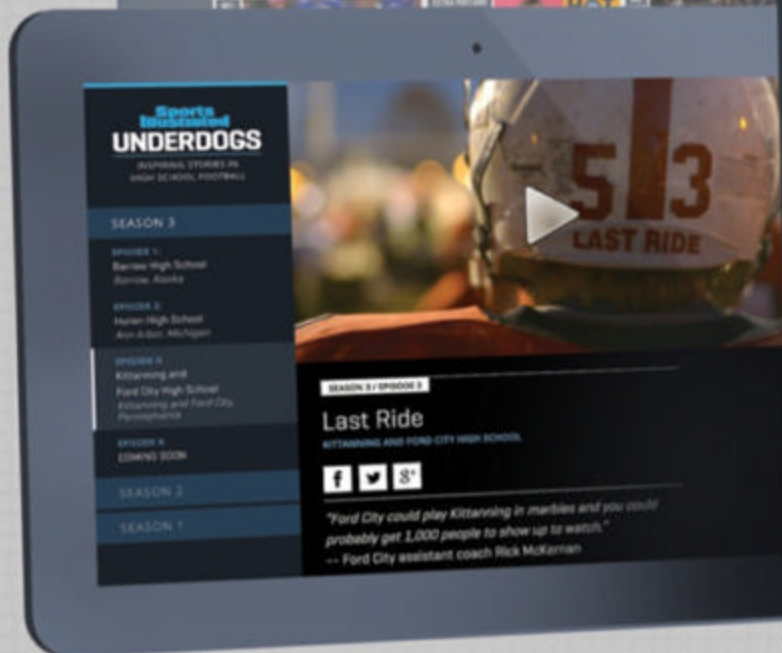
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Washington in the Rose Bowl. The Bengals drafted him in the second round and immediately installed him in the starting lineup, where he would remain for the next nine seasons, catching 299 passes for 3,795 yards and 20 TDs. These were not high times in Cincinnati: During McGee's tenure the team went 45–99 with no playoff berths and nine starting quarterbacks. The circumstances forced McGee to look inward. "There are so many things surrounding the team that you can't control," he says. "You had to say, As an individual, how am I playing?"

Cut by the Bengals after a knee sprain shortened his 2001 season, McGee spent a year with the Cowboys, but the arrival of future All-Pro Jason Witten made him expendable during training camp in '03. The Giants called a few months later when their starting tight end, Jeremy Shockey, was injured, offering McGee a roster spot and a shift in perspective. "I remember [in Cincinnati] we would look at the veteran that comes in halfway through the year and be like, Man, we never want that to be us," McGee says. "Then that's you." As the season wound down, he knew he was done.

AT FIRST THERE were restless mornings, times McGee would wake up and work out and then not know what to do, but still, by most standards, he had a full plate. Warm weather and affordable real estate had brought him to Florida, where he had his show on Orlando's ESPN Radio affiliate. (That quickly proved a grind: "You do a radio show in Orlando in June when the draft is over, NBA playoffs are over. That third hour was a struggle.") He had a 5% stake in The Beacon, a trendy lounge that counted former Reds shortstop Barry Larkin and NBA guard Dee Brown among



its co-owners, and a 10% stake in Champions Sports Complex.

And he soon discovered he could make easy money in Orlando's booming real-estate market, buying eight properties in a two-year span and flipping them for \$1 million in profit. "At that point I'm like, I'm never doing a business," McGee says. "I'm just doing this forever." That fantasy collapsed with the subprime mortgage industry. The resulting recession wiped out The Beacon, which shuttered in 2009.

McGee launched a small roofing supply company with a partner, who suggested McGee attend a meeting about FF&E (accounting jargon for furniture, fixtures and equipment) to drum up business. Without even knowing what the term meant, McGee charmed and angled his way onto a team that successfully bid to outfit the suites at Orlando's Amway Arena. More contracts followed for nearby theme parks and hotels, until one night an acquaintance mentioned having recently granted a

+
Delivering
McGee, who scored 21 TDs on 322 receptions during 11 seasons, broke free during a 1998 game against the Broncos.

SI.COM

To watch a video about Tony McGee and to see the entire Pro-Files video series, go to SI.com/pro-files

\$93 million contract to a logistics company. McGee's ears perked up. "What's that?" he asked.

Inspired, he flung himself in a new direction. The fit proved natural. In early 2011 he landed his first contract, moving seized contraband for U.S. Customs. "He's got the personality," says John Jordan, owner of Total Logistic Services and a mentor to McGee. "He's got the charisma it takes, and he's not afraid."

After using his personal computer to draw up those first invoices himself, McGee hired six managers from a competitor and expanded. "Our situation was, Hey, you guys bring your skill set, I'll provide the platform," says McGee. HNM Global did more than \$1 million in business in its first year, says McGee, an amount that has since swelled to eight figures in annual revenue. His staff has grown to 27, with clients that range from fireworks retailers to cruise lines to German motorcycle tours.

In 2013, McGee launched an offshoot of HNM Global, HNM Express, which provides trucking and freight-moving services, and he's in negotiations to open a group of Dunkin' Donuts franchises back in Indiana. (His research: daily taste tests at Orlando locations.) He remains as active as he is ambitious, rising each morning between 4:30 and 5:00 to hit the gym. The physical toll of his NFL career is, at least for now, negligible: pronounced thumb joints, manageable ankle inflammation, minor aches and pains. He harbors no regrets about his football days and sees his success as tied to the sport, not only in the discipline it instilled but also in the financial security it provided. "That's what the NFL does," McGee says. "It gave me a head start in my second career." Even if he committed a few false starts. □



TRAINING WITH

+

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[New MLS star Mix Diskerud on how to develop fast feet](#)

MIDFIELDER Mix

Diskerud scored the first goal in New York City Football Club's history on March 8, the team's MLS debut. The quick two-touch strike from just inside the penalty box curved around Orlando City Soccer

Club goalkeeper Donovan Ricketts, the sort of clinical finish that NYCFC fans will likely soon come to expect. "Scoring that goal felt amazing," Diskerud says. "I didn't have too much time, but I think I got Ricketts off guard because I scooped it kind of quick."

Quick feet and ballhandling are Diskerud's calling cards. The son of an American (mom) and a Norwegian (dad), he grew up in Oslo with a ball at his feet—often a soccer ball, but it as easily could have been a handball or a tennis ball. "I would always be playing, juggling, doing different tricks," Diskerud says. His mom, who gave him the nickname Mix, short for Mikkel, endured the collateral damage. At least, he says, "as I got better, I would break less."

The constant juggling has led Diskerud, 24, to a prominent spot on the U.S. national team, where he puts a more typically American background to use: basketball. "I played point guard until I was 15 or 16, and I really do think that helped me," the 6-foot, 156-pound Diskerud says. "That was where I learned to see different parts of the game and to assist other players in scoring."

On the pitch, Diskerud models his game after his idol, Italian playmaker Andrea Pirlo. And he continues to develop his footwork, juggling anything he can get his feet on while trying not to break things. "The process never ends," Diskerud says. "You can always be better."

—Ryan Wallerson

EDGE

Presented by *edge*

L.A. Galaxy assistant Dave Sarachan's foot drills



Cone training (Beginner)

Weave around cones arranged in a straight line two yards apart as fast as possible.

(Advanced)

Cut inside and outside of cones arranged in a diamond formation.



Juggling

Keep the ball off the ground, using the feet, thighs and head. Focus on keeping the ball in the air for as long as possible.



Two-touch Passing

Receive the ball with the inside of one foot and quickly pass to a partner five to 10 yards away using the inside of the other with good pace on the ball.

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If You Were on a Roster of an NCAA Division I Football or Men's Basketball Team, and That Team Was Included in One of EA's Videogames Between May 4, 2003 and September 3, 2014, You Could Be Entitled to Cash Payments.

This Notice is only a summary of your rights and options. For more detailed information, visit

www.NCAA-EA-Likeness-Settlement.com
or call 1-888-283-5733 toll-free.

What's This About? A federal court is currently reviewing two proposed class action settlements concerning the alleged use of the names, images, and likenesses of NCAA men's football and basketball players in certain NCAA-Branded Videogames that were manufactured and distributed by Electronic Arts Inc. ("EA"). The two proposed settlements are (1) the "EA Videogame Settlement" and (2) the "NCAA Videogame Settlement."

The EA Videogame Settlement involves claims by student-athletes that EA and the Collegiate Licensing Company ("CLC") violated their legal rights by allegedly licensing, using, and/or selling athletes' names, images, and likenesses in EA's NCAA-Branded Videogames. The NCAA Videogame Settlement involves claims by student-athletes that the NCAA violated their legal rights by allegedly participating in the license, use, and/or sale of athletes' names, images, and likenesses in EA's NCAA-Branded Videogames. All Defendants deny any wrongdoing. The Court has not ruled on the merits of these claims.

The proposed settlements would resolve the claims described above against all Defendants. The EA Videogame Settlement has a \$40 million Settlement Fund and would resolve the claims as to EA and CLC. The NCAA Videogame Settlement has a \$20 million Settlement Fund and would resolve the claims as to NCAA.

You may be a member of one or both settlements. The two settlements share many terms and involve many of the same Class members, but are separate settlements, so you should make sure that you understand both settlements.

The Court will have a hearing on **July 16, 2015, at 2:00 p.m.** (Pacific time) to decide whether to approve the settlements. If you want to attend the hearing, keep in mind that the date and/or time may be changed, so you should check the settlement website before making travel plans. See below for more information.

Who's Included in the Settlements? If you were (1) on a roster of an NCAA Division I football or men's basketball team, and that team was included in an NCAA-Branded Videogame originally published from July 21, 2005 through September 3, 2014, **or** (2) on such a roster from May 4, 2003, **and** your jersey number or photograph appeared in such a Videogame, you may be a Class Member in one or both of the settlements.

There are different class definitions for each settlement. You should consult the settlement website for more detailed class definitions and more information about whether you are entitled to a payment under either settlement.

Are These Settlements Related to the Trial Against the NCAA I've Heard About? You may have heard recently about a trial involving student-athletes (led by Ed O'Bannon) against the NCAA. Although the trial involved claims that the NCAA used student-athlete likenesses without permission, those claims were against the NCAA only for violations of antitrust laws. Also, unlike the claims being resolved by this settlement, the claims in the trial involved a request for injunctive relief (a court order discontinuing certain practices). The claims in the trial did not involve claims for cash payments for past conduct. The Court found that the NCAA violated antitrust law and entered an injunction. The NCAA has appealed. The Court's opinion can be found at www.NCAA-EA-Likeness-Settlement.com.

What Do the Settlements Provide? Both proposed settlements provide for cash payments to eligible Class Members. You can make a claim under both settlements. More information about how payments will be calculated (the "Distribution Plan") is available at the settlement website.

In addition, Class Counsel will seek from the Court the following attorneys' fees awards: (1) **EA Videogame Settlement:** up to \$13.2 million in fees, \$2.5 million in expenses, and incentive awards to the Plaintiffs who brought the suits ranging from \$2,500-\$15,000 each; (2) **NCAA Videogame Settlement:** up to \$5.8 million in fees, \$500,000 in expenses, and incentive awards to the Plaintiffs of \$5,000 each.

Class Counsel will file their motion for fees, expenses and awards by April 13, 2015. The Court will decide the issue at the Fairness Hearing (see below).

What Are Your Options?

(1) Get a Payment: You are eligible for a cash payment if you qualify and submit a Claim Form—either online or by mail—to the Settlement Administrator by **July 2, 2015**. More information about how to complete and submit the Claim Form is available at the settlement website.

Requesting or receiving a payment under these settlements will NOT affect your eligibility to compete in NCAA athletics.

(2) Exclude Yourself from One or Both Settlements: You must submit a separate exclusion (or "opt-out") request for each settlement from which you wish to exclude yourself. You may exclude yourself from one or both settlements. Your exclusion request must be mailed to the Settlement Administrator's address below so that it is **postmarked by May 4, 2015**. More information about how to opt out is available at the settlement website.

(3) Object to One or Both Settlements: You have the right to object to any element of one or both settlements, including the Distribution Plans and Class Counsel's requests for fees, costs, and incentive awards. You cannot object in order to ask the Court for a higher payment for yourself personally, although you can object to the payment terms that apply generally to the Class. Your objection request must be mailed to the Settlement Administrator's address below so that it is **postmarked by May 4, 2015**. More information about how to object to one or both settlements is available at the settlement website.

When/Where Is the Fairness Hearing? The Court will hold a hearing on **July 16, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. (Pacific time)** to consider whether to approve the settlements, including the Distribution Plans and the attorneys' fees and incentive awards. You may ask to appear at the Hearing, but you don't have to. The courthouse address is United States District Court for the Northern District of California, 1301 Clay Street, Oakland, CA 94612. The date and/or time of the Fairness Hearing may be changed, so you should check the settlement website before making travel plans.

How Do I Get More Information? The settlement website, www.NCAA-EA-Likeness-Settlement.com, contains more detailed information. You also may call the Settlement Administrator toll-free at 1-888-283-5733, e-mail at info@NCAA-EA-Likeness-Settlement.com, or write to the Settlement Administrator at Gilardi & Co. LLC, P.O. Box 8060, San Rafael, CA 94912-8060.

SCORECARD



Derrick Bisnett | *Bismarck, N.D.* | *Wheelchair Basketball*

Bisnett, a senior forward at Wisconsin-Whitewater, scored 36 points to lead the WarHawks to a 68–55 win over Illinois–Urbana Champaign for a second straight intercollegiate title. He averaged 20.0 points, 9.6 rebounds and 8.3 assists this season and was named the national player of the year.



Amy Wang | *Sewell, N.J.* | *Table Tennis*

Amy, a sixth-grader at Orchard Valley Middle School, made the semifinals on the last day of trials in Dallas to become the youngest member of the U.S. women's team that will compete at worlds in Suzhou, China, next month. In 2014 she won the national cadet title and was runner-up at junior nationals.



Philip Hall | *Fayetteville, N.C.* | *Track and Field*

Philip, a senior at South View High, won the 1,000, 1,600 and 3,200 meters at the 4A indoor meet and anchored the 4×800 relay to a state record [7:57.23], leading the Tigers to the championship. Last year he received the Laurel Wreath Award, the state's highest athletic honor. Philip will run at N.C. State.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited By ALEXANDRA FENWICK



Marissa Wells | *Freeland, Md.* | *Polo*

Marissa, a senior at Hereford High, scored 17 goals to lead the Maryland Polo Club to a 22–7 win over Central Coast Polo Club [San Luis Obispo, Calif.] and a second straight national interscholastic title. She was named the tournament's No. 1 all-star. Marissa will compete at Texas A&M.



Roman Jaworsky | *Las Vegas* | *BMX Racing*

Roman, a ninth-grader at Clark High School, earned the amateur title at Grand Nationals in Tulsa with his 13th win for 2,323 points, 140 more than Andrew Townsend of Hampton, Va. Roman, 13, was the first rider under 16 to earn the title in nine years. Last July he was fifth in his age group at worlds.



Melissa Marchese | *Irvine, Calif.* | *Synchronized Skating*

Marchese, a senior captain at Miami [Ohio], led the RedHawks to gold in the collegiate division for the 11th straight time, extending their U.S. figure skating record for consecutive titles. Miami, skating to a program with music from the movie *Nine*, scored 94.12 points to beat Michigan by 8.43.

Nominate Now ▼

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to SI.com/faces. For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow [@SI_Faces](https://twitter.com/SI_Faces) on Twitter.



JUST MY TYPE

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

DAN PATRICK: *If I ask your wife, Viveca, what annoys her most about you, what would she say?*

WILL FERRELL: My lack of attention to detail in terms of scheduling. As far as pickups or drop-offs, I strand our kids at a lot of places.

DP: *What would your kids say?*

WF: That I think I'm funny, but I'm not.

DP: *Do they think Kevin Hart is funnier?*

WF: Oh, yeah. They also love [Adam] Sandler. They love all of my competition.

DP: *Did you fill out an NCAA tournament bracket?*

WF: I did, and I lost it. I have no idea where it is. Oh, wait. . . I have Kentucky.

DP: *I saw John Madden was upset by your spring training appearances.*

WF: I know. Madden went after me.

DP: *Why?*

WF: He's always singled me out. Someone told me he wasn't given the piece of information that it was all for charity, which makes me laugh even harder knowing that John Madden just thinks I've instructed Major League Baseball to allow me to play in five spring training games for my own jollies.

DP: *What was the conversation like with*



WILL FERRELL

OUT OF LEFTFIELD

The actor and comedian played 10 positions for 10 teams in five Cactus League games on March 12 to support the fight against cancer. His new movie, *Get Hard*, opens on Friday.

commissioner Rob Manfred when you persuaded him to let you do it?

WF: The commissioner said, "O.K., don't get hurt." We were very fortunate he was completely on board. Some of the managers? A little skeptical.

DP: *Who did not want you out there?*

WF: The Diamondbacks' manager [Chip Hale] was not happy with me. I came in to [play]

leftfield. We were down 9-1. I say *we*. By the time I left, we were down 12-1.

He was quoted as saying, "I did not enjoy today. Ferrell cost us three runs."

DP: *Hale is a by-the-book guy.*

WF: He's a no-nonsense guy. He's exactly right. They kept hitting balls out to me that I just couldn't get to. I kept them in front of me. I always hit the cutoff man. There were a couple that a pro would have caught. I kept seeing the pitcher put his hands on his hips. Then I ran into the dugout trying to be funny, and no one would look at me. I said, "C'mon, guys, let's get 11 runs here."

DP: *Did you wear a protective cup?*

WF: Oh, yeah.

DP: *Are you still wearing it?*

WF: No. There were authenticators from Major League Baseball that took everything that I was wearing because they might display it for the Hall of Fame. So they literally took my cup. □

GUEST SHOTS SAY WHAT?



Louisville coach
Rick Pitino

compared this season's Kentucky team with his 1996 NCAA champion Wildcats. "I don't think they're as good as my team," Pitino said. "Remember, the SEC was much tougher back then. I believe our average margin of victory in the SEC was 21 points." . . . Warriors point guard



Stephen Curry may be the favorite for

MVP, but he wants to change the selection process. "[Players] should have a portion of the vote," Curry told me. "Obviously, we're the ones playing against each other and know who's having the best year." . . . TNT's



Craig Sager doesn't mind Gregg Popovich's

non-answers during interviews. "If he wants to take it in a different direction, that's up to him," Sager said. "Same with Phil Jackson. You could ask him about defense, and he's going to give you an answer about Saturn."



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Bethany Hamilton Pro Surfer



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A PERIODIC LOOK AT SOME OF
THE MOST INTRIGUING RISING STARS

BIG BOARD

Prized Catch

Byron Buxton, MLB's best prospect, wants
to wield a bat more than a rod in 2015

BY ALBERT CHEN

THIS SHOULD TELL you a little something about how last summer went for baseball's best prospect: Byron Buxton's fondest memories are not from the diamond but from an irrigation ditch. Buxton—the 21-year-old centerfielder who has been called a baseball prodigy, the savior of the Twins and the Next Mike Trout—spent more time wielding a fishing pole than a baseball bat in 2014, when a slew of hard-luck injuries turned what should have been a breakout year into a lost season. After mornings in rehab at Minnesota's minor league complex in Fort Myers, Fla., he would get into his red pickup, drive a few miles, park along the side of a roadway and find a suitable spot next to an irrigation ditch where he'd pursue catfish until the sun set.

Often Buxton's fishing partner was fellow Twins prospect Miguel Sano, a third baseman whose season was cut short with an elbow injury and who

was also looking for ways to while away the hours. "One day Miguel showed up with four buckets, and I was like, What is all that for?" recalls Buxton, an experienced angler from rural Baxley, Ga. "And Miguel went out and caught 35 fish! Man, I'll never forget that day." Buxton adds, "Of course, we'd have had a lot more fun if we were healthy and at the ballpark."

It speaks volumes about Buxton's gifts that he is still regarded as the best minor leaguer in the game by most analysts, even though it's possible he collected more catfish than plate appearances (137) last season. Buxton is ranked No. 1 by Baseball Prospectus and MLB.com and No. 2 by *Baseball America* thanks to his five-tool skills: He can hit to all fields like Kirby Puckett; possesses the arm of Russell Wilson (Buxton, who flashed a 98 mph fastball at Appling County High, was also



MARK J. REBILAS/USA TODAY (BUXTON); LARRY GOREN/FOUR SEAM IMAGES/AP (JACKSON); DAVID DUROCHIK/AP (SOLER); TOM SZCZERBOWSKI/GETTY IMAGES (POMPEY); CHRIS CARLSON/AP (PEDERSON)

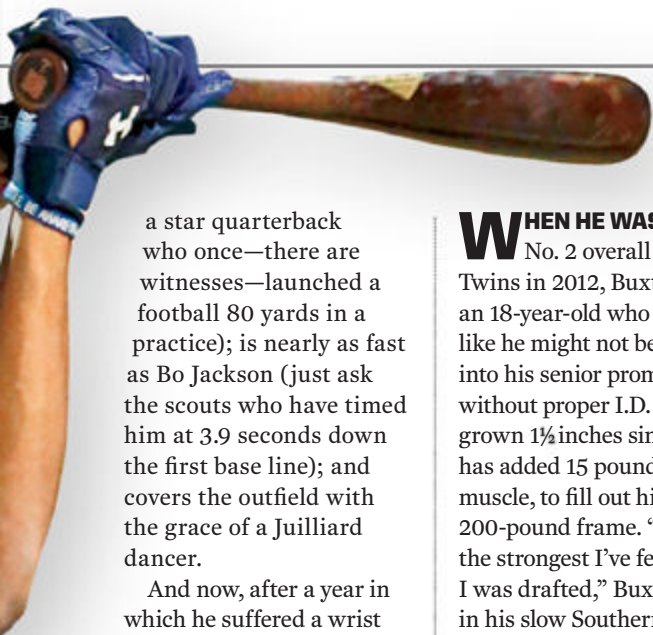
SHOW MEN

Four other
young outfielders
who will make
a major impact
in the major
leagues

ALEX JACKSON MARINERS

Picked No. 6 in 2014, the power-hitting 19-year-old has the most potential of any high school hitter drafted by Seattle since Alex Rodriguez in 1993.





a star quarterback who once—there are witnesses—launched a football 80 yards in a practice); is nearly as fast as Bo Jackson (just ask the scouts who have timed him at 3.9 seconds down the first base line); and covers the outfield with the grace of a Juilliard dancer.

And now, after a year in which he suffered a wrist injury, a concussion and a dislocated finger, the most enthralling prospect since Trout arrived with the Angels in 2011 is ready to take off. Buxton will start out at Double A Chattanooga but should be in the Show by summer's end. "Our expectations for him have been sky-high since the day we drafted him," says Twins scouting director Deron Johnson, "and he's exceeded all of them."

"Last year was tough, of course," Buxton says, "but I worked hard to get back to 100 percent, and I'm ready for this season. I've never been more ready."

WHEN HE WAS picked No. 2 overall by the Twins in 2012, Buxton was an 18-year-old who looked like he might not be allowed into his senior prom without proper I.D. He's grown 1½ inches since and has added 15 pounds, all muscle, to fill out his 6' 3", 200-pound frame. "I feel the strongest I've felt since I was drafted," Buxton says in his slow Southern drawl.

By now everyone with the Twins knows the legend of Byron Buxton: That he put up video game numbers (a .513 average, 17 doubles and 38 steals in 39 games) his senior year at Appling High. That he was *Baseball America's* 2012 High School Player of the Year. That he was so fast that he reached base on routine two-hoppers to shortstop and stole bases on pitchouts. That Jack Powell, the Minnesota scout who signed Buxton, gave him an 80—the highest grade possible—on every skill except power, and that he has only given one other player such high marks in

RISING STARS

For an exclusive video feature on Byron Buxton, or to watch any of the Rising Stars series presented by Symetra, go to SI.com/risingstars

his 37 years of evaluating players: Josh Hamilton.

Last spring Buxton was coming off a 2013 season in which he dominated the Class A Midwest and Florida State leagues and was named *Baseball America's* Minor League Player of the Year after hitting .334/.424/.520 with 49 extra-base hits and 55 stolen bases. But a few weeks into spring training, he sprained his left wrist while attempting a diving catch during a minor league game. He returned to the field five weeks later, at high Class A Fort Myers, but five games later he slid into third and reinjured the wrist. In August he was sent to Double A New Britain (Conn.), but logged just three at bats before colliding with a teammate while running down a ball in the outfield. Buxton left the field

on a stretcher, was rushed to a hospital and escaped with just a season-ending concussion. He was back on the field at the Arizona Fall League in November, but suffered a dislocated finger.

"Just a lot of bad luck," Buxton says on a spring training morning at the Twins' complex. He grew up three hours southeast of Atlanta in a house off a dirt road and remains a country boy—his idea of a well-spent Saturday is cutting grass while listening to country music on his headphones—and tends to put everything into simple terms: "Just got to hope for the best and work as hard as you can."

Buxton has only 204 games on his minor league résumé, so 2015 is far from a make-or-break year. And yet there is a sense that this is the season for him to take a big step forward. "You hear about the Next Big Thing all the time," says 39-year-old Twins outfielder Torii Hunter, "but this kid is the real deal. I expect big things from him, and I expect him to be doing those big things in Minnesota this year." □

JORGE SOLER CUBS

Chicago's nine-year, \$30 million deal for the 23-year-old Cuban prospect looks like a bargain; he could be a difference-making bat in the middle of the order this year.



DALTON POMPEY BLUE JAYS

After impressing the front office at four different levels in 2014—he hit .231 in a 39-at-bat cup of coffee in the majors—Pompey, 22, is being counted on to replace Colby Rasmus in CF.



JOC PEDERSON DODGERS

He had a 30-30 season in the minors in 2014 but only played 18 games in L.A. because of its crowded outfield. With Matt Kemp gone, Pederson, 22, will start.



MARCH GLADNESS

DANCING WITH WOLVES

Daniel Ochefu and the No. 1-seeded Wildcats had nowhere to go against Kyle Washington (32) and Abdul-Malik Abu (0) of N.C. State, which advanced to the Sweet 16 for the first time in three years.





NCAA TOURNAMENT

As the first week's games once again showed—in all their heart-stopping, tear-streaked, buzzer-beating glory—there is at least one major event in sports that never fails to deliver

BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG

Photograph by
Fred Vuich
For Sports Illustrated



C

ONFERENCE REALIGNMENT feels wrong. Pulling student-athletes off their campuses for most of March to play basketball feels wrong. Paying college players feels wrong, but *not* paying players feels even more wrong. But the NCAA tournament? It's always terrific. And it makes you wonder: How can college sports be wrong if its signature event feels so right?

"Before I answer that question, I would like to say a few words: *catawampus*, *onomatopoeia* and *antidisestablishmentarianism*," said Wisconsin sophomore forward Nigel Hayes, who was not actually responding to our question, or even the one he was asked, but instead testing the press-conference stenographer last Saturday in Omaha. Hayes continued: "Sometimes if words are not in her dictionary . . . maybe if I say *soliloquy* right now, she may have to work a little bit harder to type that word, or *quandary*, *zephyr*, *xylophone*, things like that . . . that makes her job really interesting."

Catawampus probably did present a quandary for the stenographer, who went with the less traditional spelling: *cattywampus*. Critics who say basketball players don't belong in college surely know what a catawampus is. Of course they do. A catawampus is a fierce wild animal, but only an imaginary one. You know, like a Villanova Wildcat.

O.K., cheap shot. Let's not rip those Cats for their early exit or even question their No. 1 seed in the East. Instead let's marvel at the preposterous first weekend for the team that beat them: North Carolina State.

The Wolfpack trailed LSU by seven points in the final 5:43 of its first game but won on a turnaround hook shot by 6' 9" sophomore forward BeeJay Anya. Then they turned around two days later and hooked Villanova 71–68. Logic says that reality will hit N.C. State this weekend in Syracuse. But where was logic in 1983, when the Wolfpack needed two overtimes to win its first game and then went on to win a most unlikely national title?

That tournament famously ended with N.C. State coach Jim Valvano running around the court, looking for somebody to hug. But in March the hugs usually come to you. Michigan State senior guard Travis Trice knows. He was FaceTiming with his parents before his game against second-seeded Virginia in Charlotte when he noticed an unfamiliar yellow pillow in the background. He wondered when his parents had bought the pillow. They hadn't. It was part of the decor of their Charlotte hotel room. They had driven all night from Huber Heights, Ohio, to see him play.

Trice scored a game-high 23 points on Sunday, with his mom, Julie, shrieking to distract the Cavaliers' free throw shooters. Soon she may be all shrieked out. Travis's father (also Travis) will coach his Wayne High team in the state semifinals this weekend. The younger Trice's performance gave editors yet another occasion to use the headline: SON OF COACH STARS IN UPSET.



*Maybe someday we will get tired of Bahamians named Buddy and Tum Tum starring in major sporting events. **But we're not there yet.***

Sophomore guard Bryce Alford, son of UCLA coach Steve Alford, poured in 49 points on the tournament's first weekend—36 of them on three-pointers—quieting Bruins fans who have screamed about nepotism for two years. And of course, there was 6' 6" junior R.J. Hunter, who hit a three from deep in his father's heart to help Georgia State stun third-seeded Baylor 57–56 last Thursday. Ron Hunter, the Panthers' coach who tore his left Achilles tendon in a celebration the week before, fell off his stool on the sideline

GREG NELSON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED
(MICHIGAN STATE)



SHOCK AND AW
Hustling Wichita State (above) took the battle of Kansas, while the Hunters (far left) and Alfords shared unforgettable family moments.

true TV: Drama you couldn't script, with upsets you couldn't predict, starring names you can barely believe. Dayton guard Scoochie Smith almost advanced to the second weekend, but Oklahoma smooched him goodbye. That set up a backcourt matchup between Sooners junior Buddy Hield and Michigan State freshman Lourawls (Tum Tum) Nairn, who are friends from the Bahamas. Maybe someday

we will get tired of Bahamians named Buddy and Tum Tum starring in major sporting events. But we're not there yet.

THIRTY YEARS ago a tournament featuring more than 60 teams was considered excessive. (*Why don't they just let EVERYBODY in?*) Now it is impossible to imagine the American sports landscape without it. And despite the dire warnings that college basketball is dying because of NBA defections, slow play or stoppages that clutter the ends of games, March Madness has retained its charm. College football is built on tradition, which has made the sport's radi-

and looked like he couldn't be happier about it. Two days later Georgia State's season ended with a 75-67 loss to Xavier, prompting this beautiful soliloquy from Ron Hunter: "There is nothing to be sad about. The greatest week of my life. The greatest time I ever had to be a father. I don't want these guys to be sad." Ron put his hand on R.J., and then the coach who had just said there was no reason to be sad started to sob. As he covered his face, he said, "I love this kid, man." Long before it was on TruTV, the tournament was



cal changes so jarring. But so many seminal college hoops moments were built on *defying* tradition. Texas Western over Kentucky. Phi Slamma Jamma. The Fab Five. That's why NCAA basketball doesn't feel as cheapened when it changes: Because unlike football, it lives in the now.

And the way college basketball is structured, it almost begs you not to take it too seriously. Just consider all the things that can happen when a player pulls up for a shot at the end of the game. It can go in, as Hunter's did. It can be swatted away, as Butler junior guard Kellen Dunham's three-pointer was by Notre Dame senior swingman Pat Connaughton, who flew in from a nearby airport. It can simply miss, like sophomore guard Eric Garcia's attempt to force overtime for Wofford against favored Arkansas. It could even get redirected, ever so slightly, by a zephyr.



*West Virginia will try to stun everybody by winning the national title, which would probably lead to Bob Huggins Day. **Sweatsuits for everyone!***

This is why even the most devastating losses do not inflict lasting damage. The image of that poor Villanova piccolo player crying after the N.C. State loss was telling. Sure tears dripped down her cheeks. But she kept playing her instrument. Life moves on.

And when Wichita State thumps Kansas like a xylophone, there are implications beyond the men on the court. Jayhawks coach Bill Self has declined to schedule the Shockers during the regular season, the sporting equivalent of a politician refusing to debate his underdog opponent. In basketball terms the Shockers' 78-65 win was not much of an upset. But to Wichita State fans, it sure felt like sticking it to the Man.

One month does not clean up a year-round enterprise. But if we're going to complain about how dirty the bathwater is, we should at least enjoy the baby. Last year, as he announced he would not be leaving Wisconsin for the NBA, 7-foot star Frank Kaminsky wrote, "I hate looking in my bank account at the end of the month and

seeing \$20 left in there." Yet he stayed for his senior season to chase a national championship that would make Frank the Tank a legend among Badgers fans.

Sure some critics want schools to defund athletics completely. But most of us, deep down, oppose that opposition—put simply, we subscribe to a form of anti-disestablishmentarianism. We realize that the worst of big-time college sports is not representative of the whole enterprise; that real student-athletes outnumber the faux ones; and that even if players are being exploited by the system, there are worse kinds of exploitation



SO UPSETTING

Trice (20) shot the Spartans past UVa with four treys; Gary Browne (14) and West Virginia pressed Buffalo into 17 turnovers and an early exit.

than getting a free education, playing college basketball and being the toast of campus for four years. Or even one year.

And speaking of which: Kentucky, with its mix of one-and-done, two-and-done and three-and-done stars, will try to win its ninth national championship. Duke (with three potential one-and-dones of its own) will try to win its fifth—all in Mike Krzyzewski's tenure.

Tom Izzo, with a team full of four-and-dones, will try to lead Michigan

State to its seventh Final Four since 1999. West Virginia will try to stun everybody by winning a national title, which would probably lead to Bob Huggins Day in the state: Sweatsuits for everybody! UCLA, which has won more national championships (11) than any program, will try to upset heavily favored Gonzaga. Think about *that*. It's like Goliath dressing as David for Halloween.

The tournament is almost guaranteed a memorable finish, because either Kentucky will sew up the first unbeaten season in 39 years or somebody will beat the Wildcats. And the most likely final would feature a battle of 6' 11" freshmen who could be drafted No. 1 this June—Duke's Jahlil Okafor against Kentucky's Karl-Anthony Towns—plus enough other NBA talent to pay an agent's cellphone bill for a few centuries.

Kentucky-Duke would be epic. But we have 14 more games before we get there—if we get there. And that means 14 more chances for a nation to stop what it is doing, forget which bills are due and stare at the television. In that moment it doesn't really matter if you know that *onomatopoeia* is "the creation of words that imitate natural sounds." You still get a thrill when a game-winning shot goes *swish*. □

TWINS PEAK



If the college careers of Aaron and Andrew Harrison consisted exclusively of tournament games, they wouldn't be two of the most scrutinized players in Kentucky history—they'd be two of the most celebrated. After underperforming in the first four months of 2014-15, the twin, 6' 6" sophomore guards are reasserting themselves as the 36-0 Wildcats' most important offensive players. "Those two carried us [to the 2014 title game]," says coach John Calipari. "Now they're starting to do the same thing again." —*Luke Winn*



ANDREW HARRISON

"I just play better in big games," the point guard said during the tournament's opening weekend. "I'm more focused."

	GAMES	OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY RATING	ASSIST-TO-TURNOVER RATIO
2014-15 REGULAR SEASON	31	109.0	2.1 to 1
SEC/NCAA TOURNAMENT	5	127.2	6.5 to 1

AARON HARRISON >

The two guard arrived in Lexington with the nickname *The Ice*; he's justified that with his three-point shooting.

	2013-14 (GAMES)	2014-15 (GAMES)
REGULAR SEASON	30.6% (31)	29.4% (31)
SEC/NCAA TOURNAMENT	48.0% (9)	45.0% (5)





WHO IS THIS MAN?

No longer obsessively training, Nash is determined to stay home and look after his kids while waiting to see which turn his life takes next.



The Legacy of **Steve Nash**

*Look at the best
point guards
in the NBA
today and you'll
see the influence of
the underestimated
Canadian who
transformed his
position and
reimagined pro
basketball offense*

BY LEE JENKINS

Photograph by
Scott Council
For Sports Illustrated

NBA



ON MARCH 12 at the Langley Events Center in Langley, B.C., St. Michaels University School played G.W. Graham Secondary School in the quarter-finals of the provincial championship tournament. The G.W. Graham point guard was a 5' 10", 145-pound sophomore named Gabe Mannes. When he took the court, he wiped the soles of his sneakers. Before he caught an inbounds pass, he licked the tips of his fingers. After he hoisted a shot, he held his follow-through, wrist bent at 90°. "Every mannerism," says St. Michaels coach Ian Hyde-Lay, "exactly the same."

Legacy is a word that gets thrown around a lot in sports, often incorrectly. The dictionary definition—something received from a predecessor—is far different from the popular meaning. *Legacy* increasingly refers to an athlete's compilation of awards, records and championships. But those are lines on a résumé. The athlete's imprint on the future is his legacy.

When Gabe Mannes touches his sneakers, that's Steve Nash. When the Heat's Goran Dragic deploys the up-and-under, that's Steve Nash. When the Spurs' Tony Parker runs three pick-and-rolls on the same possession, when the Trail Blazers' Damian Lillard lets fly because a foolish defender sneaks under a screen, when the Mavericks' Rajon Rondo drives inside, circles back and patiently finds a cutter, that's Steve Nash. When the Warriors go small, the Hawks go fast and somebody somewhere torches a trap with a meticulously placed bounce pass to a careening giant, that too can be traced at least in part to Steve Nash. His legacy lives on in NBA stars such as Chris Paul and Kyrie Irving, Russell Westbrook and Ricky Rubio, even if they aren't fully aware. It lives on in Canadian teens such as Gabe Mannes, who does not attend Nash's alma mater but clearly hails from his school. All these young point guards enjoy freedoms Nash made possible. "He created a new way to play," the Warriors' Steph Curry says. "He inspired me to play the way I was comfortable."

After 18 trend-setting, pocket-passing, finger-licking seasons Nash, 41, is retiring from the NBA. The end was interminable: three wretched years in Los Angeles sabotaged by nerve damage in his back that deepened with every change of speed and direction. Fast breaks were brutal and road trips unbearable. The frayed nerve caused his right hamstring to feel perpetually pulled, and

while he could ignore the rising pain, he could not overcome the diminished dexterity. He lost the agility to maneuver around screens and exploit angles. He lost the attributes that made him Steve Nash.

He spent practices in the weight room at the Lakers' training facility and games in the weight room at Staples Center, performing choreographed exercises that looked like tribal dances. "Keep chipping away," he'd tell team strength and conditioning coach Tim DiFrancesco, a mantra that eventually nauseated them both. "Every day was like another hit in the nose with a hammer," DiFrancesco says. The only thing Nash chipped away was his own psyche.

He played 15 games last season and felt as if he needed three weeks to recover from each one. "Oh s---, am I done?" he'd ask himself on the mornings after. "Is it gone? Is it over?" The anxiety fed the agony. The Lakers' announcement in October ruling him out for 2014–15 was a reprieve. His body made the call that his heart couldn't. Nash would retire, and everyone around him knew it, but he didn't make the announcement until last Saturday on The Players' Tribune website. He didn't discuss the decision with a reporter until the afternoon of March 18 on the patio of a Greek restaurant two blocks from his home in Manhattan Beach.

I **SUBSCRIBE TO** the idea that an athlete dies twice," says Nash. "It's hard. You're going to miss it forever. You have to take some time and grieve your former self." He does not know exactly where he stands in the mourning process. He views himself neither as the legend who earned two MVPs in Phoenix nor as the convalescent who struggled to carry his luggage in L.A. "I'm still just the kid from Canada with one scholarship offer," Nash says. He is the Santa Clara freshman who kept getting stripped at center court by teammate John Woolery and considered leaving until an R.A. in his dorm helped persuade him to stay. He is the junior who spent his summer around Gary Payton and Jason Kidd at Cal, where a loose ball once rolled out of the gym, to which Payton cracked, "Let the little man go get it." He is the senior who was nit-picked by NBA evaluators convinced he didn't have the right specs and didn't come from the right place and didn't even walk the right way.

He's not pigeon-toed enough, lamented Suns scouts, who wanted to take Syracuse's John Wallace with the 15th pick of



REMEMBER THE MANE

Nash's approach lives on in the way that (from left) Rondo circles in search of cutters, Parker plays pick-and-roll and Curry attacks.



the 1996 draft. But Phoenix had just hired 33-year-old assistant coach Donnie Nelson, formerly of Golden State's front office, who met Nash when he starred at St. Michaels and drove down to Seattle for a Warriors-Sonics game. *O.K., whatever, church boy Steve*, Nelson thought at the time. But he tracked Nash through NCAA tournament games at Santa Clara and pickup runs in Oakland. The day of the draft Suns owner Jerry Colangelo asked Nelson, "You feel good about this kid?"

Colangelo liked Nash, as did assistant coach Danny Ainge. Nelson confirmed their instincts. "If Stevie is not a success," he replied, "you can have my job."

Nash entered the league as a third-stringer, behind Kidd and Kevin Johnson, putting himself through two-a-days to learn a floater and a crossover. Entering the NBA as a 6' 3", 195-pound Canadian was daunting. Piling up more than 17,000 points and 10,000 assists despite a congenital back condition was unfathomably difficult. "I didn't feel right if I didn't train," Nash says. "I didn't sleep well if I didn't train. So I just trained



Young point guards enjoy freedoms Nash made possible. "He created a new way to play," says Curry. "He inspired me TO PLAY THE WAY I WAS COMFORTABLE."

all the time. I was preoccupied with the thought that I should be in the gym. That made me the player I was, but at the same time I became a prisoner of it." Even when he qualified for eight All-Star teams, he could barely enjoy the experience, fearing it might jinx him. "I felt like if I ever sat back, happy about something, reality would be right around the corner," he says. "So you get back in there early tomorrow and try to push it all away."

Sitting on the restaurant patio a half-dozen blocks from the beach, he looks relieved. He wears a T-shirt and shorts, sneakers with no socks. His expression has always been serene, masking the furnace inside, but he seems to smile more. He hasn't unleashed a shot in five months, which he mentions with pride, like an alcoholic who wants you to know how long it's been since he last touched a drink. "Shooting, for me, was an addiction," he says. "It was an obsession. I put so much pressure on myself for so long. In some ways it is a relief to finally back away from the edge of that cliff."

He has no clue how he will replace the rush, or if he

even wants to, so for now he plays weekly seven-on-seven soccer games at a park in Venice, helps his three kids with their homework, walks the dog. He believes he will find the right outlet organically. He is not the type to pop in old Suns tapes or compare himself with Curry. He recoils at the mention of legacy and chuckles at the suggestion that he changed his sport in any fundamental way. But if there has been a death, there has also been an inheritance, one eternal dime passed down from the ultimate floor general to his many heirs.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE to pinpoint when and where the NBA's point guard revolution began, but the spring of 1999 in Dallas is as good a guess as any. Donnie Nelson had moved to the Mavericks as an assistant coach and helped persuade the head man—his father, Don—to acquire Nash. Donnie would come out looking like a genius yet again, but this time it would take a while. Nash's first season in Dallas was the worst of his professional career. During a particularly grueling stretch Nash's agent, Bill Duffy, called him every day for three weeks to offer encouragement. Nellie wasn't as empathetic. He didn't understand why Nash kept turning down shots. "I'm the point guard," Nash explained. "I want to pass. It's my nature."

In 1999 that was still a reasonable stance for a ballhandler to take. "It's bulls---," Nellie responded. "You're a dominant f----- player." Nellie believed, as most contemporary coaches do, that the best point guards should shoot as well as pass, one skill complementing the other.

On March 24, 1999, Dallas lost to the Rockets and Nash went 1 for 10. Mavericks forward Dirk Nowitzki remembers the 1. "I was on the bench, and the fans were booing Steve over and over again," Nowitzki recalls. "Right when the booing got really bad, Steve ran down the court as fast as he could, put up a three and hit it. I thought, Wow, this guy has big stones in his pants."

Nowitzki and Nash relaunched pro basketball in Dallas. They arrived together, as the headliners in a transformational three-team trade, but Nowitzki was a 20-year-old draft choice from Germany and wanted to spend two more seasons in Europe. The Mavericks urged him to fly over for the press conference, meet Nash, then decide. He and Nash wound up living in the same apartment complex, playing H-O-R-S-E every off-night and experimenting with the pick-and-roll. "Here's a guy who is 5' 10", slow and unathletic," says Nowitzki, prone to hyperbole. "He's driving into trees, getting trapped in midair and somehow throwing the ball through his legs to a shooter in the corner."

The Mavs adored Nash, but they fretted about his degenerative back condition, and when he became a free agent in 2004, Phoenix signed him to a six-year, \$65 million deal. "We didn't even know how we were going to play," says former coach Mike D'Antoni, who had taken over the Suns midway through the previous season. During his seven years in Europe, D'Antoni's



teams had treated games as rapid-fire recitals, spacing the floor and uncorking the three. “I was afraid to do that here,” he says. “Everyone told me, ‘You’ll kill your players. You’ll get fired.’”

That summer D’Antoni met with Jerry Colangelo and his son, Bryan, the club’s GM, and they uttered the words he had been waiting to hear: “Use your best five.” D’Antoni shifted Amar’e Stoudemire to center and Shawn Marion to power forward, radical moves that downsized the lineup, spread the floor and enabled Nash to reimagine the offense. “He showed what can happen when a great point guard has an open court and the freedom to make choices,” D’Antoni says. “The game explodes.”

The Suns failed to win a championship, so they were easy to dismiss as a seven-seconds-or-less novelty act, but they’ve flourished in more recent incarnations. Watch the Spurs and the Warriors, the Hawks and the Rockets, running their incessant pick-and-rolls; you’ll notice hints of Phoenix in all of them. “It looked like chaos,” remembers former Suns forward Grant Hill, now an NBA analyst for Turner Sports. “But eventually teams adopted their style, and Steve was largely responsible for that. It used to be the point guard came down, threw the ball inside or gave it to a wing. Steve provided a new blueprint. If you’ve got a guy like Curry or Lillard, Westbrook or Paul, you hand him the keys. Maybe you have some sets, some structure, but you basically trust his instincts and let him go.”

Hill signed with Phoenix in 2007 and was greeted with bullet passes he didn’t always see coming. “If you missed one,” Hill recalls, “Steve would say, ‘My fault,’ and then he’d go right back to you.” Sprinting alongside Nash, Hill resuscitated his career, the same as Channing Frye, Marcin Gortat and



It’s impossible to pinpoint when and where the NBA’s POINT GUARD REVOLUTION began, but 1999 in Dallas is a good guess.

TEXAS TWO-STEP

Under Don Nelson (above, center), Nash and Nowitzki made Dallas care about more than just football.

scores of others. Take Tim Thomas, a 36.9% three-point shooter who rose to 42.9% in his lone season with the Suns. He parlayed

that spike into a \$24 million contract with the Clippers and was barely heard from again.

Nash’s legacy transcends positions and crosses borders. When he was growing up in Victoria, B.C., he could count on one hand the number of significant NBA players from Canada. Over the past four years the country has produced five lottery picks, including the last two No. 1s. *He makes everyone better* is the phrase most often used to describe Nash, and it rings true throughout North America, except perhaps in the city where he happens to live.

IN THE SUMMER of 2012, Nash had a chance to depart the sinking Suns for the Lakers, Knicks or Raptors. “I want to be in the fire,” he told his friend Steve Kerr, now the Warriors’ coach. “I want the biggest risk and the biggest reward.” The sign-and-trade that sent Nash to Los Angeles and four draft choices to Phoenix crippled both an iconic player and a signature franchise. Nash completed only one game before he broke his left leg. Soon he was rehabbing and the Lakers were rebuilding, an onerous task given all the picks they had surrendered.

Even after Dwight Howard bailed for Houston and Pau Gasol for Chicago, Nash was hanging around the periphery of the Lakers, his back an issue and his \$9.7 million salary an albatross. In Canada, Arizona and Texas, his name was synonymous with golden eras. In Southern California it evoked unusually dark days. “What I saw was a guy in a fishbowl, swimming

THE DANCE NEVER ENDS

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in circles, swimming upside down, trying to jump out and constantly hitting his head on the glass,” says DiFrancesco. “Meanwhile everybody is banging on the glass like, Come on, Steve, get going, get your act together, stop b.s.’ing around. They’re seeing him float through the end of his contract. But I was inside that fishbowl, and my view was, No one is swimming harder and trying more ways to get the hell out of this bowl.”

When Nash realized in October that he would never escape the water, he immediately leaped into meetings with his film production company, Meathawk, and the Steve Nash Foundation, eager for a second act. “It was madness,” he says. He gave himself no time to grieve. He finally met with another young retiree, from the business world, who shared a popular Buddhist philosophy: Empty your cup. The saying is traditionally attributed to a Chinese Zen master who was encouraging a scholar to clear his mind so it could be filled anew. Nash’s absence from the Lakers’ facility perturbed fans, but he was draining his cup, remaining on the roster only in case the club wanted to trade his expiring contract.

Still, the Lakers kept paying Nash, so it was appropriate for him to return to their headquarters two months ago and begin tutoring rookies Julius Randle and Jordan Clarkson. Randle, a power forward who broke his right leg on opening night, was limited to form shooting. Nash taught him to extend his wrist on the follow-through. “I know things didn’t go well here,” Nash says. “It blew up. But I wanted the pressure. I wanted the challenge. I don’t regret it.”

He isn’t going anywhere. He has settled in Manhattan Beach with his 10-year-old twin daughters, Lola and Bella, and his four-year-old son, Matteo. Nash splits custody with his former wife, and for once he can read to the kids without thinking about the gym. Both his girls play volleyball, the unofficial pastime of L.A.’s South Bay, and he observes youth sports with curiosity. “Parents try to buy the 10,000 hours,”



YELLOW FEVER

The move to L.A. was a disaster for both Nash (with Howard, 12, and Kobe Bryant, 24) and the Lakers.

*“I want to be in the fire,” Nash told Kerr before going to the Lakers. “I want **THE BIGGEST RISK** and the biggest reward.”*

he says. “It’s drills and strength coaches and skill development. But you lose a lot. At the park there’s no instruction, so you create constantly.”

His childhood home backed up to Victoria’s Hillcrest Elementary School, which felt like a private playground. His mom, Jean, established a netball team for young mothers, and he tagged along to practices. His father, John, was a professional soccer player who praised Steve’s passes more than his goals. “That’s what made him happy,” Nash says. “So when my dad told me he liked a pass, I wanted to re-create it and get that positive reinforcement—that love from my father.” He tries to follow his parents’ example. “I want to foster in my kids a passion for sports, but I have to be careful,” he says. “I can’t do it completely. I can only open an environment and encourage them in whatever they do.”

Jean and John worry that their oldest son’s nerve trouble will be chronic, despite his protests to the contrary. “His body has to work another 50 years,” Jean says. Steve is already the general manager of Canada’s men’s national basketball team. His foundation has raised and distributed \$4.8 million for child welfare in the last decade. The production company he started with his cousin Ezra Holland has created two documentaries. Nash could go in any of those directions—basketball, philanthropy, film—or in all, or in none.

For now he is finishing his *horiatiki* salad and then picking up Matteo at school. “I’m trying to be as unencumbered and uninfluenced as possible,” he says, “so I can say goodbye to this part of my life and find out what the next part is going to hold.”

His cup is empty. The one he leaves behind overflows. □



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2015 MLB
PREVIEW

Till T



his Year



*Welcome to the era of
the one-winter rebuild.
Which team can call itself
a true contender with a
straight face? Save
yourself some time and
count the ones that can't*

BY TOM VERDUCCI

Illustration by
Tim Marrs



2015 MLB
PREVIEW
ANYONE'S YEAR

T

HE INITIAL sales pitch went over about as well as a robocall at dinner-time. When White Sox general manager Rick Hahn phoned Peter Greenberg, the agent for outfielder Melky Cabrera, upon the opening of the free-agent shopping period last fall, Hahn didn't have a chance.

"With all due respect," Greenberg told him, "you guys have a fair amount of needs, and Melky wants to win."

Needs? Hahn's club stood closer to irrelevance than to the post-season. Over the previous two seasons Chicago had lost 188 games—the franchise's most losses in back-to-back seasons since 1970 and '71—and finished a combined 47 games out of first place. The White Sox not only missed the playoffs for their sixth straight season in 2014 but also sold fewer tickets for their eighth straight year. They'd lost 44% of their paying customers since 2006.

About six weeks after that phone call, on Dec. 11, Hahn texted Greenberg while sitting on a plane in San Diego, preparing to fly home from the winter meetings. By then Hahn had traded for starting pitcher Jeff Samardzija and spent \$86 million on free-agent first baseman and designated hitter Adam LaRoche and relievers Zach Duke and David Robertson.

Greenberg texted back: "Let's chat."

Just five days later, Cabrera signed with the White Sox for \$42 million over three years.

Press 1 if you plan to be in the playoffs within the next year. . .

THE BASEBALL world these days doesn't turn over as easily as the push of a button; it only seems that way. Thanks to two wild cards in each league, spending limits on amateur talent designed to thwart big-market advantages and a boom in local television rights—and fresh off the first World Series between two teams that each failed to win 90 games in a full season—a championship is within realistic reach of more teams than ever.



**TEAMS CAN DREAM BIG
WITH JUST 88 WINS IN THEIR
SIGHTS—ONE OR TWO GAMES
OVER .500 EACH MONTH.**



Over the past decade 27 of baseball's 30 franchises have played in the postseason, and the three wallflowers were among the busiest teams this off-season: the Blue Jays, Mariners and Marlins. Just about every club thinks it's the next version of the 2014 Giants, who, coming off a 76–86 season, slipped into the playoffs through the second wild-card door with only 88 wins and rolled to the title with a 12–5 record in October.

The list of starry-eyed teams includes even San Diego, which won 77 games last year in a fourth straight losing season while batting .226—the lowest average in MLB in a full season since the inaugural Padres of 1969. Rookie general manager A.J. Preller, padding his frequent flier account to three million miles and typically operating on four or five hours' sleep, escorted San Diego into the ranks of post-season hopefuls with a front-office version of speed dating: He acquired or traded 29 players in 12 days in December. Among the acquisitions were outfielders Justin Upton, Wil Myers and Matt Kemp and catcher Derek Norris—and, after



away from a wild card (they won 22 of their next 27 before coming back to earth).

The new magic number in baseball is 88. In three years with the second wild card, 30 of 33 teams with at least that many wins made the postseason. Compared with a three-year window a decade ago (2002 through '04), when eight such teams were left out in the cold, the chance that 88 wins could get you into October improved to 91% from 75%. (Going back 30 years, it was a coin flip: just 50%.)

Playoff hopefuls also are emboldened by the extinction of "superteams," which largely corresponds to the decline of the I-95 Corridor of Power: the decline of the Phillies and the Yankees and the waffling of the Red Sox. Then, too, there are the financial measures pushed by former commissioner Bud Selig to create more parity: the competitive balance tax, caps on draft spending and penalties on international signings. From 1997 through 2005, 17 teams won 100 games. In the nine seasons since, only three teams have, including none in the past three years—the longest stretch without a 100-win team in a full season since the 162-game schedule began in '61.

Without these Goliaths, the incentive to quickly upgrade mediocre teams is stronger and the prospect of advancing in the postseason less daunting. Over the past four years the playoff teams with the fewest victories in each league have fared better than the teams with the most, going 40–35 and taking 12 of 20 series.

"Certainly if you are a true 83-win team, there is enough variance where you may jump up and win 87, 88," Hahn says. "But Detroit has won our division four times in a row, and the AL champs play in our division. So we view it as we have to get to the 90s to be in this mix. If we fall short of 90 wins, yes, there are opportunities with the wild cards to get to the promised land."

Two weeks after winning just 73 games last year, the White Sox convened

an organizational meeting with the team's top executives and staff, including owner Jerry Reinsdorf, executive vice president Kenny Williams, Hahn, assistant general manager Buddy Bell, manager Robin Ventura, pitching coach Don Cooper and hitting coach Todd Steversen. Even with Rookie of the Year first baseman Jose Abreu, now 28, and ace Chris Sale, now 26, the news was grim. The system, which hasn't drafted a homegrown All-Star position player since third baseman Joe Crede in 1996, offered little immediate help.

Even Reinsdorf walked out of the room saying, "We have more holes than I anticipated." He gave his staff a directive: "Address as many as we can and as quickly as we can."

THAT 70S SHOW

Shields, Kemp and Upton (clockwise from top left) have revitalized the 77-win Padres, while the White Sox added Samardzija, Cabrera and Robertson to a 73-win club.

pausing for a metaphorical nap, Preller signed free-agent righthander James Shields to a four-year, \$75 million deal, the largest in team history. For those of you scoring at home, that's four All-Stars and a Rookie of the Year (Myers) in Preller's first winter on the job.

"Now it's not about hope," says Padres lead investor Peter Seidler. "It's about an expectation we're going to be a competitive, winning team this year and again, year after year."

Hope is so 2011. The 89-win Royals of last season are proof that you don't need to build a superpower to win a pennant. In fact, you can play mediocre baseball for three months (they started 48–50) and still be one good run

2015 MLB PREVIEW ANYONE'S YEAR

ONE OF the first things Hahn did was reach out to a 31-year-old who only 15 months earlier had been an unwanted middle reliever with a career 4.60 ERA. “It was August, I was in Triple A with the Reds, and I had an opt-out clause,” Duke says. “I figured somebody in a pennant race would want a lefthanded reliever. Nothing. No team called. My only option was to go back to Triple A with the Reds. I realized then I had to change something.”

That night Duke decided to throw sidearm in a bullpen session for Ted Power, the pitching coach at Triple A Louisville. “That stuff is really good,” Power said. Duke promptly reinvented himself from a conventional pitcher to one who throws any of six pitches from multiple release points, including sidearm. Over the last two seasons—a late 2013 call-up by Cincinnati and a strong ’14 with the Brewers—he had a 2.21 ERA and increased his K/9 from 4.7 to 10.5. The White Sox signed Duke for \$15 million over three years, more than he had made in his 10 previous seasons combined.

“The different mix of his pitches and Zach’s feel for why he was having success gave us as much comfort as you can have with a reliever going forward,” Hahn says.

The Chicago bullpen was ghastly last season—it walked the most batters in baseball, struck out the fewest and lost the most games—so Hahn wasn’t done. He signed Robertson (four years, \$46 million), who, at 29, is the youngest of only 10 pitchers to appear in at least 60 games in each of the past five years.

Hahn also addressed the rotation by trading for Samardzija—a righthanded complement to lefthanders Sale and Jose Quintana—and balanced the lineup by signing the switch-hitting Cabrera and the lefty LaRoche (two years, \$25 million) to bat on either side of Abreu. The moves increased the payroll from \$90 million to \$115 million—still below the club record of \$128 million four years ago.

“This winter,” Hahn explains, “was about not squandering the primes of careers of players like Abreu, Sale, [outfielder] Adam Eaton and to a lesser extent [outfielder] Avi Garcia. It was about having a Cy Young candidate in Chris and an MVP candidate in Abreu signed reasonably for the foreseeable future and not feeling comfortable about, Let’s take another two years and build up the core around them.”

THE PADRES will carry a franchise-record payroll of about \$97 million, though only up from \$91 million last year. The renovation job actually began last Aug. 6, with the hiring of Preller. “What became obvious was we needed a difference maker,” says executive chairman Ron Fowler. “And we found one.”

Preller, 37, grew up a Don Mattingly fan on Long Island and talked himself into an internship with the Phillies as an undergrad at Cornell, which led to jobs with Major League Baseball, the



DEATH OF THE SUPERTEAM

In MLB's Age of Parity, ultradominant clubs are nearly extinct

DECADE	100-WIN TEAMS	TOTAL TEAM SEASONS
2005-2014	4	300
1995-2004	17	294
1985-1994	7	264
1975-1984	11	256
1965-1974	10	224
1955-1964	5	174
1945-1954	4	160



baseball. Matt Kemp, at 30, is our oldest regular. Myers has five years of control at 24. Norris is a 26-year-old All-Star. [Third baseman] Will Middlebrooks is 26. Upton is the one guy with potentially one year of control, and he’s 27.”

Dodgers and then the Rangers. In Texas he taught himself Spanish, rose to assistant GM to his college roommate, Jon Daniels, and flew so often in search of talent that he needed neck fusion surgery to correct the damage from the awkward sleeping positions on flights. “A.J.’s been working 20 hours a day—on a slow day—to get us where we are,” Seidler says.

Says Preller, “There was never just one plan. Each move we made was because we thought it was a good fit—not just for this year. This is about building something sustainable. We’re going to have one of the youngest teams in

WORLD SERIES PICK

Let's Try This Again, Cleveland BY BEN REITER



YES, THIS ISN'T the first time SI has picked the Cleveland Indians to break a World Series drought that dates to 1948. We did it in 1987, when our Baseball Preview cover featured sluggers Cory Snyder and Joe Carter standing in front of a regrettably large image of Chief Wahoo and to the right of a regrettable cover line [INDIAN UPRISING]. "Believe It!" the cover text read. "Cleveland Is the Best Team in the American League."

Snyder and Carter produced as anticipated—Snyder smashed 33 home runs and Carter became the seventh member of the 30-30 club—but we failed to predict that the rotation, which included a 48-year-old Phil Niekro and a 42-year-old Steve Carlton, would be historically inept. Its 5.37 ERA was the league's worst in more than three decades, and the club lost an MLB-high 101 games. The cringeworthy cover would become one of the prosecution's top exhibits in the case of *The People v. the SI Jinx*. Whoops.

Guess what? We're picking the Tribe again. The offense is loaded once more behind in-their-prime (if underappreciated) stars like MVP candidate Michael Brantley, Yan Gomes, Jason Kipnis, Carlos Santana and newly imported slugger Brandon Moss. This time, though, led by reigning Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber, they have the pitching staff to match—we're sure of it. After last year's All-Star break the rotation led the majors in strikeout rate (9.33 per nine), home run rate (0.56 per nine) and FanGraphs' WAR (11.0), while trailing only the Nationals in ERA (2.95). And none of its members, which also include Carlos Carrasco, Trevor Bauer and Danny Salazar, are yet 29. In an era in which it seems most everyone has a shot at a ring, the Indians will win their first in 67 years. Believe it.

Upton, Kemp, Myers and Middlebrooks present San Diego with power that's been as rare as rain. Since PetCo Park opened in 2004, Padres fans have seen their team score two runs or fewer in 40% of their games while failing to hit a home run in virtually half of them (444 of 891).

"Before, it was always, get a guy on base, try to go first to third, bunt, move him over, do whatever little thing you could do to score a run," says manager Bud Black. "Now we have power at every position except shortstop."

The revamped lineup does have several potential flaws: no true leadoff hitter, little speed and a lack of quality lefthanded hitting. Myers will not only have to move from right to the spacious centerfield at PetCo but also have to jump-start his offense after batting .222 in a season plagued by a right wrist injury.

"I played a lot of centerfield in the minors, and I've always felt like it's my best position," Myers says. "The biggest thing will just be getting used to PetCo. This winter for the first time I hired a trainer to work with me on my speed and running."

At the very least the Padres have become relevant. "There is a lot of pent-up frustration with this team," says CEO Mike Dee. "San Diego is not a small market. We have the population base on both sides of the border to draw three million." Indeed, although attendance for the past seven seasons has averaged 2.2 million, the Padres drew three million when PetCo opened.

SAN DIEGO and Chicago did their part in one of the most rip-roaring hot stove seasons in memory. According to MLB, at the start of spring training 292 players on 40-man rosters reported to a different team, roughly a 25% turnover rate. Many extreme makeovers are doomed to fail; just look at the track record of some recent teams with especially active winters, such as the 2012 Marlins, the '13 Blue Jays and the '14 Yankees. But this much is almost certain: Some club, if not more than one, will stage a dramatic turnaround this year. Every year but one in the 20 seasons with the wild-card format at least one team—and two on average—has made the playoffs the year after finishing with a losing record. The trend is even more pronounced since the second wild card was added: Nearly one-third of all playoff teams (nine of 30) qualified the year after fielding a losing team, including the past two world champions, Boston and San Francisco.

The system allows teams to dream big with just 88 wins in their sights—the equivalent of between one and two games better than .500 each month of the season. This year the White Sox, Padres and 13 other teams can pull off the now-common trick of instantly turning a losing club into a playoff club.

It's easy to see their motivation: They might be Giants. □

SPIN Kills

Hitting, that is. One reason teams are so evenly matched: Every staff teems with high-velocity arms, keeping scores low and tight. As heat keeps rising through the amateur ranks—and as pitchers discover that throwing hard is a learnable skill—there's no end in sight to the offensive drought

BY TOM VERDUCCI

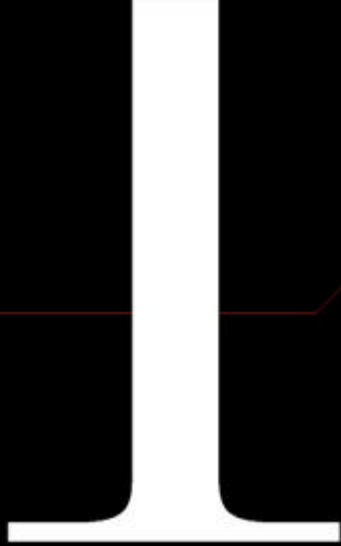
Photograph by
Robert Beck
Sports Illustrated

PITCH SPEED	92 mph	94 mph	96 mph	98 mph
REACTION TIME	400 MILLISECONDS	392 MILLISECONDS	384 MILLISECONDS	376 MILLISECONDS
IT'S LIKE BUMGARNER THROWING FROM...	54 FEET	52.9 FEET	51.8 FEET	50.8 FEET

QUICK REACTIONS

Last season Madison Bumgarner (below) threw his average four-seam fastball 92.0 mph, almost exactly the big league average (92.1). From the pitcher's release point in front of the rubber to the point of contact in front of the plate, a big league pitch travels approximately 54 feet. Here's how extra velocity compresses the batter's reaction time.





IN DICKENSIAN DARKNESS, upon damp earth and between silhouettes of scattered tall pines in the mist, I tread carefully and alone toward the Quonset hut, that architectural totem of World War II. Whatever is going on inside that corrugated galvanized steel structure, I figure it will help me understand a baseball mystery. Hands stuffed into my jacket pockets against the February chill near Montgomery, Texas, I am perhaps 40 yards from the battleship-gray half-dome when . . .

Pow-pow!

To my left, under a lone spotlight, two baseballs smack against a target of plastic sheeting, like artillery shells out of the sky.

Pow-pow!

I look behind me. Thirty yards back or so, I make out three outlines: two pitchers and a bucket of balls. The baseballs had sailed over my head. The pitchers are playing long toss in the night at a distance of 200 feet, the kind of expanse that might cause a traditional pitching coach to swallow his tobacco juice.

This is the Texas Baseball Ranch, a training ground to help pitchers win the battle over the 60 feet, six inches

that defines baseball itself. Coming here, I hope, will help me understand why it never has been harder to make contact with a major league pitch than it is today.

I am looking for Johnny F----- Guru. That is not his real name, of course, but one he unofficially adopted about five years ago after he was asked by a major league organization to give a spring lecture on pitcher training. He was standing in a hallway when he overheard one minor league pitching coach grumble to another, "Geez, we gotta listen to Johnny F----- Guru talking here at three o'clock."

Johnny's real name is Ron Wolforth. He's 56, and he pitched (not well) in college at Kearney State and coached softball at Nebraska before moving to Texas in 1995 to become a teacher of pitching. He opened the Ranch at its present location, an hour north of Houston, in 2006. Wolforth walked to the rostrum that spring training day, looked out upon the roomful of folded arms and I'd-rather-be-somewhere-else glowers and told the baseball men, "Most of you do not know who I am, and that's completely fair. I was a below-average college player. But some of you know me by my other name: Johnny F----- Guru."

He uses the same line whenever he speaks to a major league organization for the first time.

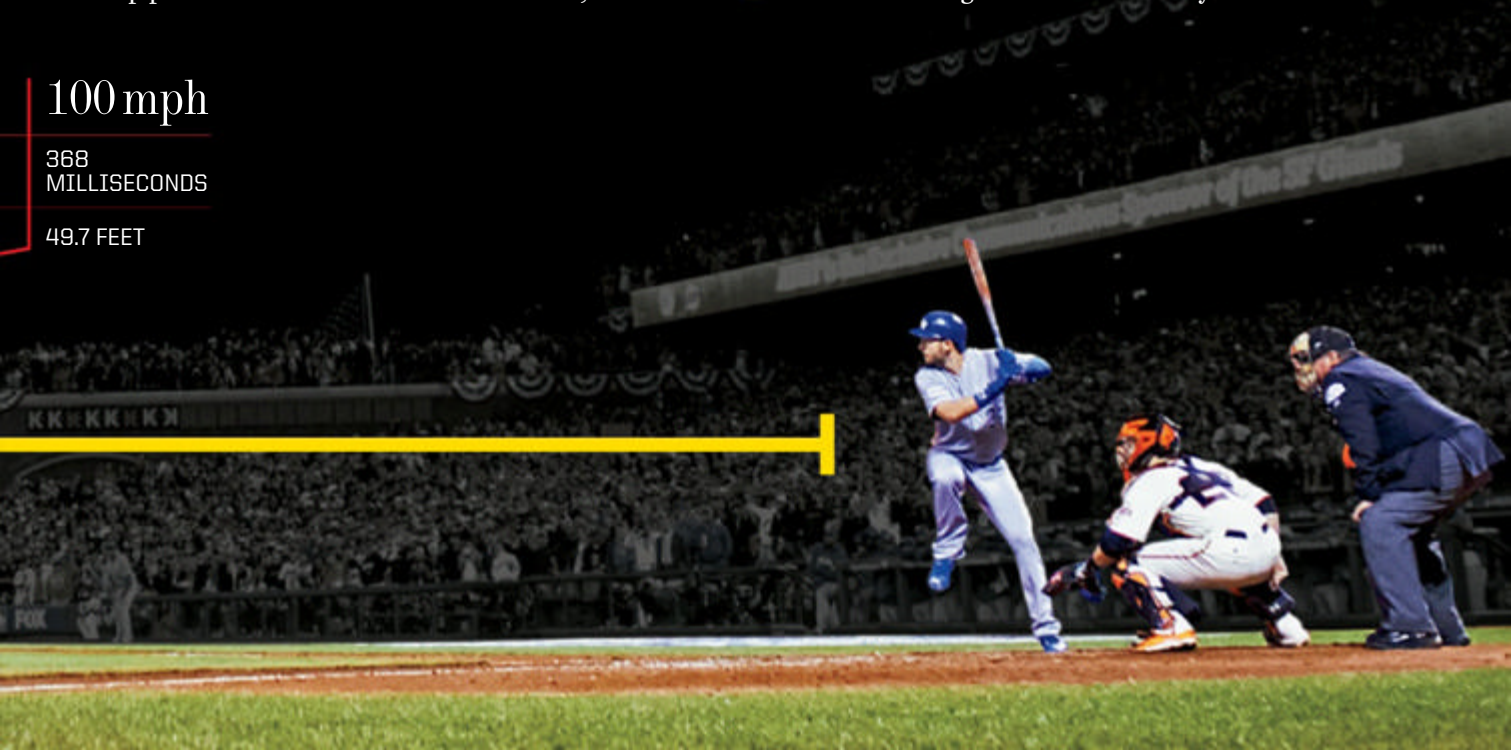
I open the door to the Quonset hut, which has the low-tech, cluttered look of a garage sale gone bad. It's late on a school night, but two kids are training. One of them looks to be in his mid-teens. The other one, much younger, weighs 75 pounds, tops. Johnny F----- Guru is not here. A trainer tells me he is in the small house at the top of the hill, back through the pines.

Earlier in the day 36-year-old lefthander Barry Zito, the 2002 AL Cy Young Award winner, was in the Quonset hut, having moved with his wife from San Diego to spend the winter training at the Ranch after a year out of baseball.

100 mph

368
MILLISECONDS

49.7 FEET



2015 MLB PREVIEW HEAT RISING

Another former All-Star, who wished to remain anonymous, was consulting with Wolforth over the phone about a flaw in his delivery. Both pitchers hired Wolforth as if enlisting a gumshoe to track down a former flame: their velocity. (The second pitcher's agent, explaining the request for anonymity, told Wolforth, "His major league pitching coach would go nuts if he found out.") Wolforth claims to have worked on the Ranch with at least 78 major league pitchers and draft picks, including Scott Kazmir of the A's, Trevor Bauer of the Indians and Tyson Ross of the Padres.

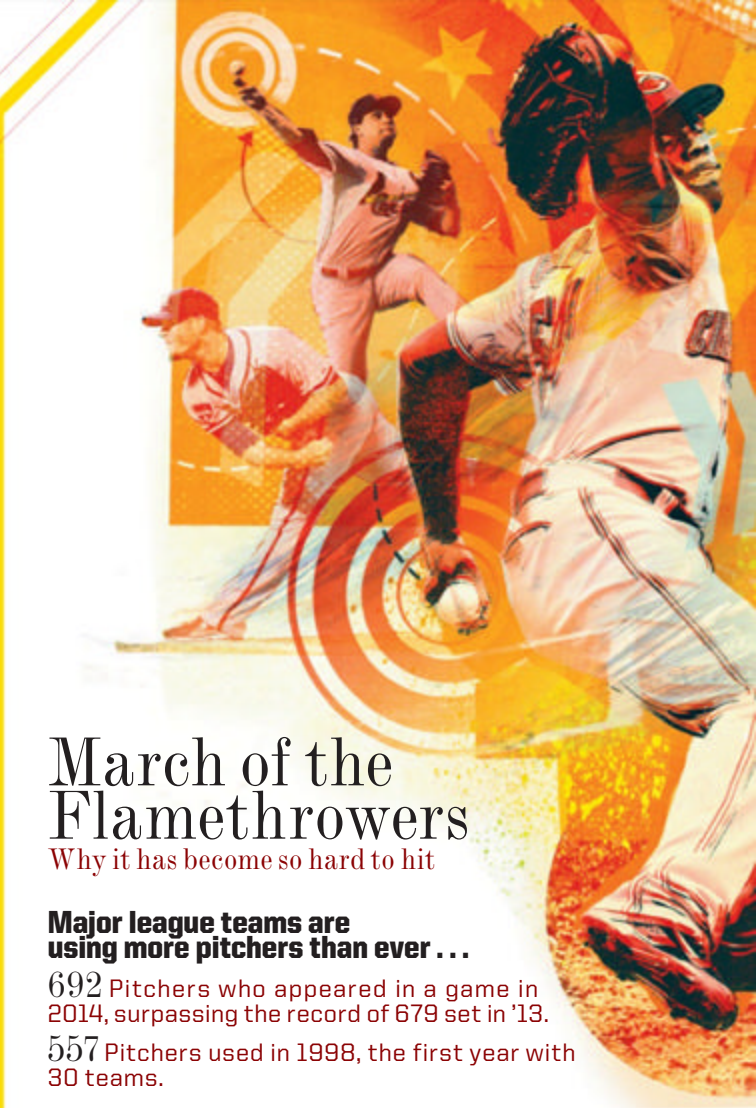
I meet Wolforth in the small house. He has the stout bearing of a football coach but the measured tone of a high school chemistry teacher. Indeed, the more he talks the more I realize that the 60' 6" war is being won with science. Once an inscrutable art, pitching has grown less impressionistic because of data. Its genome has been sequenced. Thanks to biomechanics, kinesiology, high-speed cameras and military-grade laser tracking devices, we know the optimal way for a body to work when throwing a baseball.

The caricature of a pitching coach used to be a guy who spat tobacco and dispensed bromides such as "get your arm up" and "you're flying open." Today, "it's almost like you need a Ph.D. in motor learning and kinesiology," says former Vanderbilt pitching coach Derek Johnson, 43, a Ranch acolyte whom the Cubs hired as their minor league pitching coordinator in 2013. "It wasn't that way 12 to 15 years ago."

Now a pitching coach's job might involve reducing the effect of 60 Newton meters of valgus torque on the elbow with proper strength training and kinetic movements, correcting dangerous flaws such as an "elevated distal humerus" or "crossing the acromial line," and improving health and velocity with proper arm deceleration. We can deconstruct not just pitchers but also individual pitches. We know, for instance, that Red Sox closer Koji Uehara can throw his 88-mph four-seam fastball past hitters because it spins at the ridiculously fast rate of 2,511 revolutions per minute (about 15% faster than average), and faster-spinning fastballs don't sink as much as hitters expect.

So much for art. This kind of data-based learning, which is happening on all levels, has created a fundamental shift in the game. What was once blasphemous to the baseball gods has become accepted fact: Velocity can be learned, and by everybody from a 75-pound preteen to a Cy Young Award winner.

THE SINGLE greatest reason for the Great Hitting Recession is this: The supply of arms that throw harder and harder is becoming greater and greater, which allows teams to suffocate offense by making more and more pitching changes. The average major league game last season included 7.9 pitchers. For the season, the average team used 23.1 pitchers. The Royals—who reached



March of the Flamethrowers

Why it has become so hard to hit

Major league teams are using more pitchers than ever ...

692 Pitchers who appeared in a game in 2014, surpassing the record of 679 set in '13.

557 Pitchers used in 1998, the first year with 30 teams.

And more and more of those pitchers are throwing heat ...

61 Pitchers whose fastballs averaged at least 94 mph last season (minimum 50 innings).

19 Pitchers who averaged at least 94 mph in 2004.

92.1 Average major league velocity (in mph) last season, the sixth straight year it increased.

Relievers are more specialized and throwing harder over shorter outings ...

64.8 Percentage of relief appearances last season that lasted four batters or fewer.

38.7 Percentage of such relief appearances in 1987, when A's manager Tony La Russa began popularizing modern bullpen usage.

And the heat wave is just beginning ...

52 Minor league pitchers who hit 100 mph during a game in 2014, according to *Baseball America*.

9 High school pitchers who hit 96 mph at events run by Perfect Game, an organization that sponsors showcase events and tournaments for elite teenage players.

6 Pitchers who hit 96 at Perfect Games events between 2001 and '05.



Game 7 of the World Series on the strength of this more-horsepower-is-better model, primarily with relievers Kelvin Herrera, Wade Davis and Greg Holland—and the White Sox are considering eight-man bullpens this season.

Since the advent of the designated hitter in 1973, it never has been harder to get a hit than it is today. Runs are down to 4.07 per game, the fewest since '81. Strikeouts are at an alltime high, while walks are the lowest in 93 years except for the apocalyptic '68 season, when offense and interest sank to such depths that baseball lowered the mound and shrunk the strike zone to breathe life into the game.

The steady supply of power pitchers—average major league velocity has increased six straight years, from 90.9 mph in 2008 to 92.1 last year—creates a calculus that conspires against hitters. A batter has about 0.4 of a second to hit a 95-mph fastball traveling roughly 54 feet. (The pitcher releases the ball in front of the rubber, and the batter typically makes contact in front of the plate.) But if the hitter uses all of that time to decide to swing, it's too late. He has roughly one-third of that span to read the direction of the pitch. Most decide to start to swing in those first 18 feet the ball travels. The ball's flight over the next 18 feet allows 0.13 of a second to decipher speed and spin—and that's where the processing stops. The last 18 feet is left to the physics of the swing: the

hitter putting the barrel where he estimates the ball will be.

As pitchers add velocity, they compress the already precious window that hitters have to read pitches. There is no opposite corollary—nothing for a batter to do to *gain* time. That's why Bauer, for one, believes hitting as we know it will die. "With less time to read and react, hitters will have to look for a certain pitch in a certain spot and sell out," the righthander says, using the hitting term for guessing ahead where the ball will be. "The smartest hitter in the game right now is [Tigers DH] Victor Martinez. That's what he does. He'll [swing at] an inside fastball at 98 in a nonfastball count and hit it out. The only way you can do that is to sell out."

Pitchers begin with a fundamental advantage: They dictate the action. The hitter's job is to react. Greg Maddux used to say that pitching was like shooting free throws or putting: a mechanical activity in which success is defined by the ability to replicate form. The batter has no such luxury: His task is complicated by a moving ball and variables such as speed and spin. As technology teaches us more about athletic movements, actions without the ball in motion are far easier to teach and to learn than those that depend on a ball in unpredictable motion.

"We're definitely doing a better job of developing pitchers than hitters," says Indians president Mark Shapiro. "It's a more repeatable, digestible action. We're headed toward—and we didn't even mention the use of defensive shifts—an era of defensive-minded baseball."

Wolforth's Quonset hut is just one place where the imbalance between pitching and hitting is growing. It is also happening in other academies, training centers, and minor league and major league facilities where pitching is studied, dissected and taught. The hut is an applied science laboratory. If the rules of baseball are left untouched, there is no doubt where we are headed: straight to 1968.

THE FIRST priority in Johnny F----- Guru's Velocity Enhancement Program is health. All potential clients must fill out a questionnaire in which they rate on a scale of one to 10 any soreness or pain in four areas of the body during or after throwing. If any response is four or higher, Wolforth tells the player to see a physical therapist. "I know what some people say about me, 'He's the guy who does some crazy [stuff] and covets velo'—and that's it," Wolforth says. "I can teach you to throw harder, but if you get hurt, what good have I done you? None.

"What scares me are the [coaches] out there with a one-size-fits-all mentality. I was at spring training a couple of years ago with one particular team and walked through their weight room. There was a sign that said WORKOUT OF THE DAY, with all the exercises everybody was supposed to do. It didn't matter what position you played or what size you were or what your flexibility was. How does that make any sense at all?"

"He knows his stuff," says Angels general manager Jerry Dipoto, a former big league pitcher. "And it's not just about velocity. Anybody I've seen that used his program has very sound health. Every MRI I've seen on his clients has been clean."

Those accepted into the program spend the first three weeks

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working on nothing but “decel”—Ranch-speak for deceleration, or what happens to the pitching arm after the ball is released. Wolforth figures if he is going to give pitchers a bigger motor—more velocity—he must upgrade the brakes first. Much of the strain on the shoulder comes after ball release, when those muscles bring the arm to a halt. As Wolforth studied mechanics, he found that the greatest pitchers, regardless of how hard they threw or how they arrived at their release point—from Nolan Ryan to Greg Maddux to Mariano Rivera—shared similar deceleration habits. The pitching hand continued fluidly behind the body with a slight bend in the elbow.

A bonus to good decel is it also can improve velocity.

Under general manager Jeff Luhnow and pitching coach Brent Strom, who also works at the Ranch, the Astros have become such big believers in the importance of this braking mechanism that they signed free-agent reliever Chad Qualls after the 2013 season to a two-year, \$6 million contract in part because they loved his decel. (“We also liked his ground ball rate,” Luhnow says.) In ’13, when he turned 35, Qualls threw harder than ever, with an average two-seam fast-ball velocity of 94.9 mph, while continuing to stay healthy. Last year he averaged 93.5 mph on his sinker while pitching in 58 games with a 3.33 ERA and 19 saves.

Remember the former All-Star secretly consulting with Wolforth? His sessions mostly were about decel; once perfect, it had devolved into a pounding of the brakes in which the hand stopped low and in front of the body, robbing him of velocity. Wolforth opened his laptop and showed me pictures of the pitcher in 2009 and from last year. The difference was striking.

In 2012, Paul DePodesta, the Mets’ vice president of player development and amateur scouting, invited Johnny F----- Guru to the team’s spring camp. DePodesta asked him about lefthander Johan Santana, the ’04 and ’06 AL Cy Young winner, who had missed the previous season due to shoulder surgery. “I love watching him pitch,” Wolforth said, “but his movement pattern is really bad. . . . It’s his elevated distal humerus, and his decel is just awful.”



RANCH HANDS

Wolforth (in his Quonset hut, top) helped Kazmir (right) rebuild his career and made Bauer (above, with his mentor) one of MLB’s hardest-throwing starters.



PITCHERS ARE COMPRESSING A HITTER’S REACTION WINDOW. THERE’S NOTHING A BATTER CAN DO TO *GAIN* TIME.



Wolforth touched the back of his left shoulder and the inside of his left elbow. “He’s going to have a lot of pain here and there.”

Wolforth pulled out his iPad. He showed DePodesta examples of an elevated distal humerus: when the pitcher has the ball raised in the loaded position, with his upper arm—where the humerus bone is located—higher than his shoulder. Cardinals ace Adam Wainwright, who underwent Tommy John surgery in 2011 and had surgery to remove cartilage in his right elbow after last season, and Santana have pitched this way, which puts more stress on the shoulder and elbow.

Why is this movement dangerous? Imagine holding a 10-pound dumbbell with your humerus “packed”—that is, with the elbow at shoulder height and the dumbbell near your ear. You can hold it there all day. Now lift the elbow higher than the shoulder, bringing the dumbbell above your head. Try to keep the weight steady. The shoulder and elbow quickly fatigue.

Five months later Santana hurt his back. He hasn’t pitched since. He tore his left shoulder capsule in 2013, tore his Achilles tendon in ’14 and suffered a sore shoulder that ended his attempt at pitching winter ball this year. He recently signed a minor league contract with the Blue Jays.

THERE’S ALWAYS this feeling in baseball that we are the experts,” says the Astros’ Luhnow. “There’s a natural resistance to accept the outsider. But we want to challenge our players and coaches to continue to learn.”

That dynamic is taking hold: Outside gurus like Wolforth are challenging the professional status quo, in which major



league teams often hire failed minor leaguers at five-figure salaries as pitching instructors. Wolforth began studying under former big league pitchers such as Tom House and Mike Marshall, adopting nontraditional ideas such as the use of weighted balls in training. (Under a blog titled, “Time to Get Your Money Back if Your Instructor Uses Weighted Balls,” one of Wolforth’s critics and competitors, former major league pitcher Dick Mills, called Wolforth “a self-professed pitching velocity expert” who “eventually will be regarded as just another instructor who simply uses his strong but erroneous beliefs.” Mills called the use of weighted balls “some of the worst time-wasting activities that pitchers can invest in.”)

Like Wolforth, many of the top pitching experts today never pitched professionally, including long toss proponent Allen Jaeger; former college coach Ken Knutson (who runs the AZ Baseball Ranch in Phoenix and was hired in January by the Indians under the title of throwing coordinator); former minor league infielder Perry Husband; and Kyle Boddy, a former systems analyst for Microsoft.

Boddy, 31, also worked for an online poker company and an international boutique asset management company before he began training pitchers in 2007. He built his own biomechanics lab in Seattle in '09; four years later he moved it to Puyallup, Wash. The website for his center, Driveline Baseball, says he has trained more than 20 professional pitchers and consults for two

major league teams and several college programs. It also boasts that Boddy makes use of “advanced biomechanical modeling,” “deep data mining tools” and “machine learning algorithms.”

Wolforth has an old photograph of himself and his then-eight-year-old son, Garrett, who is now a senior at Concordia Lutheran High in Tomball, Texas. Both of them wear enormous smiles. Garrett is drenched in sweat, his right arm around his dad’s shoulders. Between them Ron is holding the device that has changed baseball more than any other innovation since Michigan State coach Danny Litwhiler introduced it to the sport in 1973: the radar gun.

The gun reads 57.1. The Wolforths are so happy in the photo because they had set a goal at the beginning of the year: for Garrett to throw 57 before his ninth birthday. He hit the mark with one month to spare, then got right to work on the next goal: to throw 63 mph before turning 10. He did so in part by playing long toss up to 200 feet—80 more than some organizations prefer for their major league pitchers.

Ryan has said that velocity is “God-given.” Reds closer Aroldis Chapman, who averaged 101.1 mph with his fastball last year and in 2010 threw the fastest pitch on record (105.1 mph), said, “I think you are born with speed.” But today’s generation knows otherwise. Like college hopefuls who prep for standardized tests, a kid who puts in enough money and effort can boost the pitching measurables that create opportunity. A cynic might suggest that standardized tests do a better job of measuring the ability to take a test than of true knowledge. The same cynic would say that the radar gun does a better job of measuring the singular act of throwing hard than the craft of pitching.

What Charles Atlas did for strength training in the 1940s and '50s—with the help of sand-kicked-in-your face cartoon ads in the back of magazines—the radar gun is doing for pitching today. The platforms are YouTube and websites, but the macho come-ons are just as breathless:

“Get to 90+ MPH!”

“Add 5–10 MPH to Your Fastball TODAY!”

“7 Ways to Quickly Improve Baseball Pitching Velocity”

“Increase Your Pitching Velocity With These 3 Exercises”

Commercialism and the occasional charlatan aside, the fact is that velocity *can* be learned. Wolforth tells the story of a high school junior who came to him in 2005 throwing 68 mph, just hoping to make the varsity team. Two years later the kid was throwing 90 with a commitment to a Division I college program. Wolforth’s website boasts that his program will add five to 12 mph to a pitcher’s fastball within one year.

Wolforth accepts a maximum of 60 clients to the Ranch’s summer program (\$3,315 for June and July, four days per week), accepts some athletes into a personalized program (\$2,500 for one week) and holds a dozen three-day boot camps around the country (\$1,299 per person), giving him a clientele of about 600 pitchers, of which about 35 are professionals. Once they complete the 21-day decel training, clients at the Ranch are given what Wolforth calls a “hyper-personalized blueprint” that stresses a holistic approach.

Kazmir, for instance, after sinking all the way to inde-

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pendent ball in 2012 because of decreased velocity, needed to fix a flaw Wolforth called “forearm fly.” Instead of forming a “packed humerus,” in which the arm creates an angle of 90 degrees or less with the ball in the loaded position, Kazmir let his forearm lag, creating an angle of more than 100 degrees. Wolforth helped Kazmir fix the flaw with the use of “connection balls,” soft, inflatable orbs a bit smaller than a volleyball that can be held between the forearm and upper arm during throwing drills. The 31-year-old Kazmir’s average fastball jumped from 88.0 in 2011 to 93.5 in ’13.

Ross, 27, suffered from the flaw of “crossing the acromial line.” Imagine a straight line through the shoulders as the pitcher reaches back to throw. Now imagine the pitcher’s glove hand and throwing hand stretched behind that imaginary line, toward his back. The hand has longer to travel to release the baseball, which can lead to timing problems, an early release point and added shoulder stress. Wolforth also used connection balls with Ross. Last year the righthander made the All-Star team, threw a career-high 195 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings and had a 2.81 ERA.

In addition to the weighted baseballs, Wolforth uses other training devices that frighten many traditional pitching coaches: 10-pound wrist weights (for lightly loosening the arm), extreme long toss and something called the Baseball Training Sock, which attaches to the hand and allows the pitcher to throw a weighted ball that is captured by the sock, improving decel.

“I throw three and a half hours every day,” Bauer told me at the Ranch.

I laughed. “No, you’re not,” I told him. “Maybe you’re here for three and a half hours training, but no way you’re throwing for three and a half hours.”

“Yes, I am,” Bauer said, explaining that most of the exercises and drills all work on the throwing motion. Last year he averaged 93.8 mph on his fastball. Among AL pitchers with at least 150 innings, only three threw harder: Garrett Richards of the Angels, Yordano Ventura of the Royals and Chris Archer of the Rays.

Garrett Wolforth became a catcher. Last year he was clocked at 89 mph from behind the plate, the third-fastest throw by a catcher ever recorded at a Perfect Game showcase event. Garrett, who committed to Dallas Baptist University, was invited to play last August in the Area Code Games for top high school underclassmen. The showcase presents an extreme version of major league baseball, if not its future: A pitcher throws as hard as he can to only a few batters, then departs for the next pitcher, who does the same, and so on and so on. Fifteen pitchers, most of them 16 or 17 years old, were clocked between 93 and 96 mph—above-average major league velocity. Garrett went 1 for 17. “It was ridiculous,” he says, laughing. “One guy was throwing harder than the next, and you never saw the same guy twice.”

Tunnel Vision

What exactly is pitch tunneling? It’s using a consistent delivery and release point to make every offering, regardless of speed or break, look the same to a hitter over the first 20 feet of the ball’s flight. Few pitchers have done it better than Rangers righty Yu Darvish, as illustrated by these frames from a 2013 GIF that became a viral hit. Five different pitches from Darvish to Albert Pujols are overlaid on one image, showing how difficult it is to gauge what’s coming until the ball is halfway to the plate. Darvish is also part of another defining trend of modern pitching: He had Tommy John surgery on March 17.



NINE YEARS ago, as leading orthopedist James Andrews began to wonder why more and more of his Tommy John patients were teenage pitchers, researchers at the American Sports Medicine Institute in Birmingham, led by Andrews, studied 140 adolescent pitchers to try to identify risk factors. They found “no significant differences” between the injured pitchers and the healthy pitchers when it came to private instruction, exercise programs, pitch type frequency or the age at which certain pitch types were first thrown.

They did find two factors that seemed most responsible for whether a pitcher broke down—overuse and fatigue. The researchers also added this conclusion: “High pitch velocity and participation in showcases were also associated with increased risk of injury.”

In other words: Throwing hard at a young age can be hazardous to your health.

“When you accumulate data for the draft now it’s scary,” says Padres general manager A.J. Preller. “It’s not just that it seems like everybody throws really, really hard. It’s also that so many of the medicals on these 17- and 18-year-old kids are terrible. Elbows, shoulders, procedures . . . you see it all the time.”

Since 1999, 122 pitchers have hit 95 mph or higher at a Perfect

“The first time I faced him I thought I had no chance,” says righthanded-hitting San Diego outfielder Wil Myers, who batted against Petricka last April 25, when Myers played for Tampa Bay. Petricka threw three fastballs to get ahead 1 and 2. He missed with his next pitch, an 86-mph changeup. Then he threw a 96.4-mph two-seamer with that wicked break. Petricka released the ball two feet to the right of the center of the rubber, creating an angle by which the ball begins moving away from a righthanded hitter. About halfway to the plate, however, it redirected back toward Myers—the “arm-side run”—with added sink.

“Filthy,” Myers said of the pitch. He took it for a ball, low.

At 3 and 2, Petricka threw Myers an 85-mph changeup. Myers took it low for ball four. “I was like, Thank you,” Myers says. “If he threw that sinker, I don’t think I had any chance. That’s pitching now. There’s more velocity out there, but pitchers don’t throw fastballs as much—and when they do, nothing is straight.”

Myers is correct that even though pitchers throw harder than ever, they are using their fastball less. Fastball usage fell from 62.6% in 2004 to 57.7% in ’14. The decline is due to the popularity of the cut fastball and a technique called “splitting the corners,” which was introduced in the 1990s by Maddux and popularized (with more velocity) by Roy Halladay.

The old-school four-seam fastball–curveball combination relied primarily on the difference in speed between the two pitches. But they looked very different in that first fraction of a second when hitters decide to swing or not. The big, looping curveball went up out of the hand. The fastball came out straight.

Today pitchers rely more on the similarity of pitches. A cutter and a two-seamer, for instance, are near twins in terms of path, speed and spin rate for about 20 feet, only to suddenly diverge. A pitch from a righthanded pitcher to a righthanded hitter can veer away from the hitter (cutter) or run down and in (two-seamer). The best pitchers can make a baseball move in either direction on both corners of the plate.

Now pitchers are taking this sameness of deliveries even further. Perry Husband, another independent pitching guru without pro pitching experience, popularized this next-level sameness. He coined the term “tunneling” to describe one of the keys to modern pitching. Husband understood that if the hitter must decide in the pitch’s first 18 to 20 feet whether to swing, the pitcher can disable the hitter’s decoding process by making every pitch look the same over that distance. The idea is to use the same tunnel of airspace. Husband even calculated the size of the tunnel 20 feet from the pitcher’s hand: 13-by-10-inches, which is why Bauer built a homemade screen with a 13-by-10 cutout that he places 20 feet in front of him so he could practice throwing pitches through the tunnel.

With tunneling, pitches don’t have to be close in speed to confuse hitters. Petricka, for instance, throws his two-seamer and changeup from nearly identical release points, and they travel on nearly identical paths almost halfway to the plate—whence the two-seamer runs to the arm side and the changeup drops. Likewise, Uehara’s four-seam fastball at 88 and his splitter at 80 look identical for the first 20 feet, only to have the crazy spin rate on the fastball keep that pitch from sinking much and the low spin rate of the splitter (1,497 rpms) send that pitch tumbling.

WOLFORTH SAYS TODAY’S HARD-THROWING AMATEURS PITCH “WAY TOO MUCH AND [TRAIN] WAY TOO LITTLE.”



Game event. Only five among them made a major league All-Star team, including three who suffered major arm injuries (Kazmir, the Mets’ Matt Harvey and the Marlins’ Jose Fernandez). Only two of those high school fireballers became an All-Star and have avoided serious injury: Braves reliever Jordan Walden and 2014 World Series MVP Madison Bumgarner of the Giants.

“We really need to take a hard look at the amateur level,” Wolforth says. “This generation plays and pitches in games way too much and trains way too little. I think that’s the number one reason so many of them are breaking down.”

JAKE PETRICKA is just another arm in the arms race, a failed starter in the minor leagues who has found steady work in the White Sox bullpen. Petricka, 26, has made 83 major league appearances, with two wins and 14 saves. For the most part he doesn’t decide games; he duffs them. Petricka is valuable because he throws a 94-mph two-seamer with a spin rate of 2,320 rpm that has 6.1 inches of vertical break and what coaches call “great arm-side run.”

Translation: Petricka is a rather anonymous righthanded middle reliever who two-thirds of the time throws a sinker with nasty movement and above-average velocity.

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The popularity of tunneling is why talk about shrinking the strike zone to give hitters help may be misguided. Even with the rise in strikeouts, the percentage of called strikes has gone down for three straight years. So what's going on?

Hitters are swinging more often (they hacked at 46.6% of all pitches last season, the highest swing rate since 1990) . . . but they are making less contact (the percentage of swinging strikes has gone up for five straight years) . . . especially because they are chasing more nonstrikes (the chase rate has risen steadily, to a 31.3% swing rate at pitches out of the zone last year, a record since Pitch F/X technology debuted in 2007) . . . which is no way for a hitter to make a living. (While the contact rate on pitches in the strike zone has remained virtually unchanged since '07, the contact rate on pitches out of the zone has gone down the last three years.)

Here's what it means: pitchers, combining movement with increased velocity and tunnel deception, are better than ever at making balls look like strikes.

THE CURIOUS case of Carlos Carrasco offers a hint of where baseball is headed.

Carrasco is a 28-year-old righthander who made four poor starts for the Indians early last year and was sent to the bullpen. After three months he got another crack at the rotation, on one condition: Carrasco had to start games as if he were a reliever. That meant ditching his windup and throwing as hard as he could. Pitching coach Mickey Callaway did not care if he lasted just four or five innings.

The Indians are one of the most progressive teams when it comes to pitching. They signed Kazmir off the scrap heap (and out of the Ranch) and traded for Bauer in 2012; they hired former Ranch client and employee Eric Binder as player development assistant in '12; they signed Casey Weathers out of Boddy's academy in December (the oft-injured Weathers, 29, the eighth pick in 2007 and now with his fourth organization,

PITCHING 2.0

Qualls (top) parlayed stellar decel into a big contract; Carrasco (above) thrived as a relieverlike starter.



ONE OF THE KEYS TO MODERN PITCHING: GETTING HITTERS TO FLAIL BY MAKING BALLS LOOK LIKE STRIKES.



has yet to reach the big leagues); they hired Knutson as their throwing coordinator; and they consult regularly with Wolfarth. Manager Terry Francona has visited the Ranch.

Last Aug. 10, when Carrasco went back in the rotation to face the Yankees, he was 14–23 with a 4.98 ERA for his career. That day he threw five shutout innings and hit 99 mph on the gun. That month he had the highest average velocity on his four-seam fastball of any month in his career: 97.3 mph. Carrasco also whipped sinkers at 96 and changeups at 90. Over his 10 starts after rejoining the rotation, Carrasco pitched to a 1.30 ERA and averaged 10.2 strikeouts per nine innings.

“At some point we’re going to get some kind of rule changes,” says Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer, “whether that’s [shrinking] the strike zone or forcing relievers to face at least two or three batters instead of one, to bring more offense into the game. If it doesn’t change, we’re all in trouble.”

With Carrasco, the Indians took the traditional principle of starting pitching—pacing oneself to pitch deep into games—and trashed it. They could do this only because of supply. Not even a rise in Tommy John surgeries can stem the greatest flow of high-velocity throwers the game has ever seen. Pitching rules, not only because of stars such as Bumgarner and Harvey and Clayton Kershaw, but also because of foot soldiers such as Qualls and Petricka and Carrasco. Starters throwing 99 mph, middle relievers throwing 97-mph sinkers, dozens of minor leaguers throwing 100 . . . over every hill they keep coming and coming, as if out of thousands of Quonset huts, an army of pitchers as far as the eye can see. □

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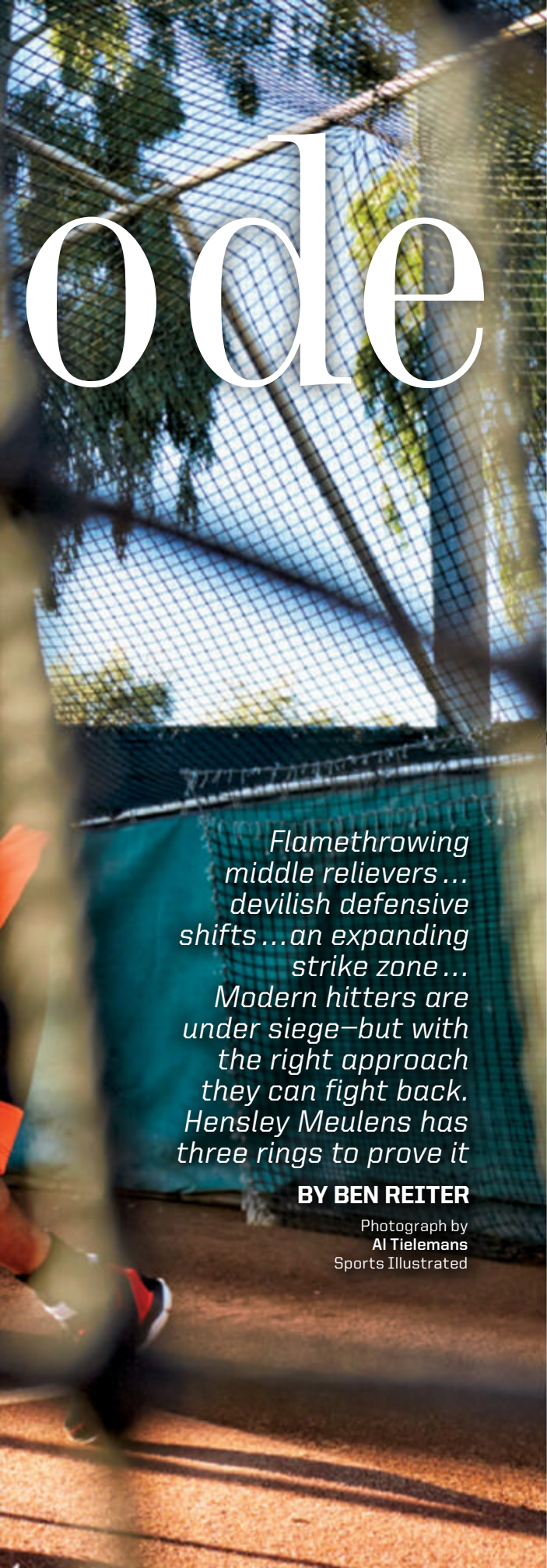


WELCOME
TO BAM-A-LOT

The Giants have never been a slugging team during his five-year term as hitting coach, but Meulens (working with minor leaguer Daniel Carbonell this spring) has helped make their offense a model for scratching out runs in a low-scoring era.

VI





ode

*Flamethrowing
middle relievers...
devilish defensive
shifts...an expanding
strike zone...
Modern hitters are
under siege—but with
the right approach
they can fight back.
Hensley Meulens has
three rings to prove it*

BY BEN REITER

Photograph by
Al Tielemans
Sports Illustrated

T

HE 1990s were going to be the decade of Bam Bam in the Bronx. The Yankees hadn't made the playoffs since '81, a drought that was supposed to end with the arrival of third baseman and outfielder Hensley Filemon Acasio (Bam Bam) Meulens from the tiny Dutch Caribbean country of Curaçao, who had crushed at least 26 home runs in three separate minor league seasons. There was just one problem: When he faced major league pitching, Bam Bam was a bust.

"I swung out of my butt trying to hit a home run every time," says Meulens, who at 47 still has the broad-shouldered, 6' 4" physique that inspired so many New Yorkers to imagine a plaque for him in Monument Park. "I didn't hit many." By 1993, when the Yankees released Meulens, he had eked out just a dozen homers in parts of five seasons, batting .221 and striking out once every 3.4 plate appearances. "The thing I thought I was going to do," he says, "I didn't do it."

Two decades later the disorder that bedeviled Meulens has become an epidemic. Batters find themselves overmatched by pitchers, and the disparity is getting worse. In 2014 the average lineup scored 4.1 runs, the fewest since 1981 and a 20.7% decline since 2000. MLB hitters batted .251, the lowest average since 1972. Often they didn't make contact: Their 37,441 strikeouts marked the seventh consecutive year they broke that ignominious record.

Some of the reasons for the offensive decline are beyond hitters' control. One is the expansion of the strike zone. In 1996, when baseball was facing a very different imbalance—too many runs were being scored—it lowered the zone from the top of the knee to the joint's hollow, encouraging umpires to call the just-above-the-knee strike, which was already in the rule book. However, thanks to the advent of QuesTec and other systems that track and grade ball-and-strike calls, the umpires got too good. A study in *The Hardball Times* by Jon Roegele showed that the strike zone has expanded by 40 square inches since 2009, from 435 to 475, with most of that growth coming in the lower reaches—pitches that are extremely hard to drive. Last season, for example, Marlins star Giancarlo Stanton had a slugging percentage of .263

2015 MLB PREVIEW HITTING BACK

on low strikes and .719 on all others. Roegele has estimated that the strike zone alone accounts for 31% of the decline in scoring. Like gamblers in debt to the mob, hitters have come to appreciate the importance of the kneecap.

Sandy Alderson, the GM of the Mets and the chairman of MLB's playing rules committee, has suggested that the league might again redefine the strike zone, this time shrinking it in favor of offenses, as soon as 2016. But even then, extrapolating from Roegele's numbers, hitters would remain at a disadvantage. For guidance, they might turn to the recently successful philosophies espoused by an unlikely guru: Bam Bam Meulens.

Meulens became the Giants' hitting coach in 2010, and using many of the five languages he speaks—English, Dutch, Spanish, Japanese and the Caribbean dialect Papiamentu—he began delivering a simple message to his new charges: Do exactly as I didn't. He wanted them to focus on making solid contact, even if it meant choking up. One influence on his thinking was notoriously capacious AT&T Park in San Francisco, which has been MLB's hardest stadium to homer in for three of the past five years. "You're hitting 415-foot fly balls, and they're an out in AT&T Park," Meulens says. "Eh. I think I'll take the single."

"The last few years we've basically been concentrating on battling. When you're in battle mode, you're instantly shortening your swing. It's not like we don't like guys who hit home runs. Bochy"—manager Bruce Bochy—"loves it. I like a three-run homer instead of a one-run single. But if we try to do that all game, it doesn't work."

In July 2012, 21 months after Meulens had helped the Giants win one World Series and three before he helped them win a second, the Dutch royal family knighted him behind home plate at AT&T Park. Last October, San Francisco won it all again. Three rings in five seasons suggests that the rest of the league might be wise to start following the strategies of the man the Giants now call Sir Bam Bam.

IN MOST major league stadiums the indoor batting cages used by visiting teams do not come equipped with pitching machines. So Meulens purchased a portable model and had a special case made so he could bring it on the road. Before the Giants take batting practice, he uses the machine to feed them breaking balls, but after BP they return to the indoor cage and face straight gas. Meulens sets the machine as high as it goes—around 90 mph—but that is just the start. With each pitch, his hitters step closer to the machine. They don't take a full swing but try only to make solid contact. "Just stop it with the barrel," he tells them. When they're so close that they can no longer get a barrel on the ball—some, like outfielder Angel Pagan, can do so until they are less than 30 feet away—they retreat toward home plate. "You go back, and everything looks really, really slow, and you have plenty of time to hit it," says Pagan.



GAS MILEAGE

Major league hitters batted .251 last season, the lowest since 1972. Against pitches thrown at 95 mph or more, they were even worse: .239. Giants batters were one of the few groups that didn't melt under the heat.

BEST BA AGAINST PITCHES 95+ MPH

1. **PIRATES** .278
2. **TIGERS** .277
3. **GIANTS** .276
4. **ROYALS** .262
- T5. **DODGERS** .260
- T5. **METS** .260
- T5. **CARDINALS** .260

SOURCE: INSIDE EDGE



entirely. Meulens quickly set him straight. "Gregor, when are you going to learn?" he asked. Says Blanco, "It wasn't easy, and it's still not easy. Sometimes I feel like I got that pop, that I can hit 15 home runs, 20 home runs a year. At the same time, it's not my game." So, at around 6:50 p.m. last Oct. 22 in Kansas City, Blanco found himself 30 feet from Meulens's pitching machine,

During Meulens's playing days he hardly ever faced a pitcher who threw harder than 95 mph, but now it seems as if every team has several. Last season, for example, 56 pitchers worked more than 10 innings while throwing an average fastball in excess of 95, a startling increase from 2007, when there were just 17, according to Baseball Info Solutions (BIS). Nine of those pitchers were starters, including Yordano Ventura, the Royals' rookie who faced the Giants in Game 2 of the World Series.

When Gregor Blanco came to San Francisco in 2012, he thought of himself as a home run hitter, even though he'd belted only three during his first three seasons and had spent 2011 out of the majors



bottom seven in pitches seen per plate appearance in each of Meulens's five seasons.

Meulens tailors his teachings to each of his charges. His best hitter, catcher Buster Posey, rarely steps into the batting cage at all. Last August, though, as Posey's average dropped to .279, nearly 30 points below his career standard, Bam Bam suggested a change. Posey, per convention, liked to see a strike before taking a swing. Meulens pointed out that when Posey swung on the first pitch, his average was nearly .500, while with two strikes, it was barely above .200. "You're taking that first-pitch strike," Meulens said. "What's it getting you?" Over the final 33 games Posey batted .414.

THE 2014 World Series was a dead heat—tied at two games apiece, 0–0 in the bottom of the second inning—when Brandon Belt came to the plate with no outs and Hunter Pence on first. Belt, San Francisco's 26-year-old lefthanded-hitting first baseman, saw that the Royals' infielders had shifted, expecting him to pull the ball against their ace, James Shields. So, with only one defender to the left of second base, Belt did something he had never done before: He bunted for a base hit down the third base line. Two batters later Pence scored, and the Giants went on to win 5–0. "I think that changed the momentum of that game," Belt says. "I don't see why I won't do it again."

If an expanding strike zone and increasing velocity were not enough, clubs have recently invented another way to make hitters' lives miserable: defensive shifts, in which managers, drawing on ever more detailed and accessible data about batters' tendencies, position their fielders precisely where opponents are most likely to hit the ball. The use of the strategy exploded in 2014. While hitters saw 6,632 shifts in 2013, according to Inside Edge, last season they encountered 14,872, an increase of 124.2%; and while two years ago seven clubs shifted fewer than 100 times, last year all 30 teams used the shift at least 195.

On balance, shifts work: Inside Edge says that they prevented 217 runs in 2014. Lefthanded power hitters bear the brunt of it—David Ortiz saw the most shifts last season, followed by Ryan Howard and Brandon Moss—but even righthanded pull hitters are not immune. (BIS recorded shifts against the Astros' Chris Carter on nearly 55% of his plate appearances.)

Hitters do have a few ways to fight back. One is by bunting, as Belt did, a tactic most sluggers are loath to embrace. Last year only five hitters bunted more than three times against the shift; the leader was Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo, with five. Another option? Minimize any tendencies that an opposing defense might detect and exploit. It should be no surprise that the all-fields approach is a favorite of the once pull-happy Meulens. Last season, according to Inside Edge, opponents put the shift on just 135 times against the Giants—111 times fewer than against any other club and 826 times fewer than against the Yankees, the MLB leaders. In fact San Francisco faced fewer shifts in 2014 than did 30 individual hitters.

Part of that was a matter of personnel: The Giants didn't have any of the classic lefty power hitters who might have inflated their shifted-against numbers. "I'm sure that Big Papi



trying to get his bat on pitches he could barely see. About 20 minutes later he received a 98-mph fastball from Ventura—and deposited it in the rightfield seats for a leadoff home run that he was not trying to hit.

While hard throwers account for many struggles at the plate, they do not particularly faze San Francisco (chart, page 72)—and in the playoffs they batted .278 against pitches delivered 95 or faster, the best among the eight teams who played multiple postseason games.

The conventional wisdom is that batters ought to make pitchers work. Meulens, however, does not believe in extending at bats deep into counts, especially when hitters are facing opponents with ever more devastating "out" pitches (chart, page 74). The Giants, meanwhile, have ranked among MLB's

HARD KNOCK

Prepped by speed drills with Meulens (above), Blanco took a 98-mph heater from Ventura deep in the World Series (top).

2015 MLB PREVIEW HITTING BACK

isn't going to change his swing now that he's 37 years old, or whatever," Meulens says. (Ortiz is 39.) But a lot of it had to do with the way San Francisco hit. In the minors Belt had a lot of success pulling the ball—he batted .350 during his career on the farm, with 34 homers in 196 games—but when he debuted in San Francisco in 2011, he found, as Meulens once had, that major league pitchers presented a different challenge. As a rookie Belt hit .225; the next year he hit .275; during the first half of 2013, he hit .260.

Belt's problem, Meulens believed, was that he was keeping the wrist of his top hand bent, in an attempt to pull the ball as he had done so productively in the minors, rather than relaxing it to cover more of the plate and to hit the ball to all fields. "It's not that I was necessarily resisting it," Belt says. "It's just that I had success other ways. When you're coming up, you hear lots and lots and lots of suggestions, some of which I did take into account, and that did not work. Everybody and their mom thinks they know how to hit, so they want to let you know. It took me a while to really convince myself it was the way to go."

"It took 2½ years," says Meulens. During the second half of 2013, Belt batted .326, with an OPS of .915. Belt missed the majority of last season due to a fractured left thumb, then a concussion, but in the playoffs he batted .295, including .308 in the World Series.

THE CONCEPT of "survivorship bias" holds that we often give victors more credit for their tactics than we should, even if they won by very slim margins. This could easily apply to Sir Bam Bam's philosophy. After all, in none of their three championship years did they rank higher than 12th in runs, and they didn't even make the playoffs in Meulens's other two years as hitting coach. Further, the 2013 champions, the Red Sox, won with a more tradi-

RING MASTER

Meulens (in black) and San Francisco were on a contact high after the Series last fall.



UNLUCKY STRIKES

Victor Martinez (left) and Justin Turner (below) are fine hitting with two strikes—at .337 and .299, respectively, they had the best BAs in that situation last year, according to STATS LLC. But for most hitters, the rise in two-strike counts is bad news.

YEAR	PA's WITH TWO STRIKES	BA WITH TWO STRIKES
2014	50.5%	.177
2013	50.1%	.178
2012	49.7%	.178
2011	48.8%	.180
2010	48.5%	.181
2009	48.2%	.186
2008	47.7%	.190
2007	47.0%	.192

SOURCE: INSIDE EDGE

tional power-based lineup, one that ranked first in the league in OPS, second in pitches per plate appearances, sixth in home runs and eighth in strikeouts.

There is, in other words, more than one way to build and refine a winning lineup. The title-minded Indians, for example, last year were shifted against more than just seven other clubs, yet their major off-season addition was the shift-inducing Moss. "We're not looking, necessarily, for him to change at all," says Indians GM Chris Antonetti. "Focus on getting a good pitch to hit, and hit it hard. And if you hit it into the seats, it doesn't matter what defense they have."

That's fine by Moss. "I don't see why I'm not first in being shifted against—Ortiz goes oppo better than I do," he says. "I don't care. I'm going to try to hit through it. Look, I can handle striking out, I can handle hitting

into the shift. But when I bunt and the pitcher fields and throws me out?" He turns to his new locker neighbor, Jason Kipnis. "I'm going to come and kick Kipnis's ass!"

"Nice bunt, idiot!" Kipnis says, imagining his pre-ass-kicking reaction.

There are no longer many players, though, who can threaten to hit 30 home runs every season, as Moss can. "I probably wouldn't have gotten any hits at all in today's game," says Meulens. "Not with the way I used to swing." In fact, to succeed as the Giants of recent vintage have, most hitters would do well to do one of the many things that Bam Bam couldn't back when he was a player: adapt. □

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Searched for the owners.
Uncovered a plot.
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Took a leap of faith.
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Let's
Go
Places

The Renais Of



sance

HURDLE

The eye test versus the cold, hard stats is yesterday's war. But when the Pirates' manager reveals he is drawing on everyone from quants to Dorothy Gale, it leaves you a little slack-jawed

BY ALBERT CHEN

Photograph by
Al Tielemans
For Sports Illustrated



T

HERE'S A quote, from that old baseball sage Nietzsche, scribbled on the whiteboard. There are books piled high on the desk—a John Wooden bio; a tome on the Japanese art of continuous improvement, *kaizen*; and more leadership titles than you'd find on an MBA candidate's Kindle. One step into the manager's office at Pirate City is confirmation that the silver-haired, perma-tanned man behind the desk is not the incurious old-school cliché you once thought he was. Office hours have

begun, and as always, the conversation wanders and bends like the Allegheny: When Clint Hurdle opens his mouth, you're never quite sure if what tumbles out next will be a line from Shakespeare or the unlocking of a great baseball mystery.

"I was reading something very interesting recently about the Golden State Warriors," Hurdle, manager of the Pirates, is saying on this spring training morning in Bradenton, Fla. This is how the digressions almost always begin: "I was reading. . . ." Hurdle carries with him on road trips four books at a time (rarely baseball-related) and meticulously studies every scouting report and statistical analysis put in front of him. ("We joke about how efficiently he zeroes in on any inconsistencies or errors," says the team's director of baseball systems development and lead in-house quant, Dan Fox.) This past winter, Hurdle explains, he came across a study of the top team in the NBA. "The Warriors, you look at their best players," the manager continues, "and they are playing fewer minutes but playing better." The piece was about how the Warriors' balanced lineup rotation had fueled their success, which led him to look into the habits of the admittedly less successful Sacramento Kings ("They have something going on too"), which led him to take a close look into player usage in the NHL. "Line changes, the rotation systems—you see their coaches with a stopwatch measuring ice time. I believe there is something to it," Hurdle says. So what, exactly, does this mean for a ball club looking for ways to keep its players performing at an optimal level through a 162-game season? He doesn't yet know (or if he does, he's not telling), but he does know this: "As an organization we always have to be

2015 MLB PREVIEW CLINT HURDLE

seeking out new and creative ways to stay ahead of the curve.”

It's always seemed so easy to peg Clint Hurdle, going all the way back to the late 1970s when he broke into the majors as a hot prospect with the Royals, a cover boy of this magazine before he'd played a full major league season: Too slick, too loud, too entitled—his old roommate, George Brett, not exactly a choirboy himself, was so fed up with the hotshot's partying that he kicked him out of their apartment—the kid seemed like just another overhyped phenom. Which indeed he was: Within four years he was out of Kansas City, and within another five, gone from the game completely. When Hurdle surfaced as a manager 15 years later in Colorado, after a series of minor league positions and a stint as hitting coach, and even after he led those Rockies to a surprise World Series run in 2007 and was hired by the Pirates before the 2011 season, he could never shake another label—Hopelessly Traditional Manager. As he—and he by no means was the only one—sermonized on grit and gushed over “grinders” like Clint Barmes and Brandon Inge, statistical analysts delighted in mocking him and lambasting the Pirates for signing him to an extension in the spring of 2013, after the franchise's 20th straight losing campaign. Then that season the Pirates became one of the best stories in baseball, with a 94-win season in which they began deploying radical defensive shifts, aggressive platooning and creative lineup construction (based not just on traditional batter-pitcher matchup data but also on a hitter's historic performance against pitchers with similar arsenals and arm slots). Along the way they shattered the long-held image of their skipper. “The Clint Hurdle implanted in my mind, and the Clint Hurdle I half-wittingly attempted to plant in your mind, might bear little relation to the real Clint Hurdle,” wrote Rob Neyer, then at SB Nation.

Last year the club won 88 games and returned to the postseason, further elevating Hurdle's reputation. The real Clint Hurdle is a baseball lifer who, in his fourth decade in the game, has evolved into an intriguing blend of old school and new school, a perfect fit for a team that has similarly transformed its laughingstock status.

In the hallway of the player clubhouse at Pirate City, inspirational posters line the walls. WE DO NOT HAVE TIME FOR JUST ANOTHER DAY, reads one, over the mug of that great philosopher, Bill Murray. Just outside the clubhouse there are silhouettes of pitchers in action with vision heat maps to indicate where the hitter's eye should be trained. SEE THE BALL, HIT THE PITCH, reads the sign next to a ranking of the Pirates' top hitters by reaction time.

A surrender to innovation is part of the reason the Pirates, after decades of futility, have become the National League's version of the Tampa Bay Rays: a club that has figured out how to win with a shoestring budget. With a payroll that perennially ranks in the bottom third (22nd last year), the



ROCKY ROAD

The headlines, so kind at the start (top right), curdled with Hurdle's struggles on the field and remained grim through a managerial stint with Colorado and his first two years in Pittsburgh.

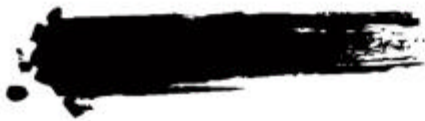
Pirates over the last two years have won more games than every club in baseball but the Dodgers, Cardinals, A's and Tigers. They have built a loaded minor league system and, after years of investment, one of the premier programs in Latin America. But the big-

gest key to their success may be this: The front office and major league coaching staff are on the same page with organizationwide, data-driven decision making.

The turning point for the franchise that was a disgrace not so long ago? You could point to the fall of 2007, when the Pirates tabbed a new general manager: Neal Huntington, a 38-year-old Amherst-educated special assistant to the GM with the Indians, who cleaned house upon his arrival and instilled an emphasis on scouting and player development while simultaneously creating an analytics department headed by former *Baseball Prospectus* writer Fox. Or you could point to the winter of '10, when the Pirates persuaded Hurdle to turn down an offer from the Mets and instead become the face of a woebegone franchise that hadn't finished above .500 since 1992. Or perhaps it was



**“IT IS WHAT IT IS,”
HE SAYS OF THE ’78
SI COVER. “I LOOK
AT THAT CAT AND
I’D LOVE TO SIT
DOWN AND HAVE A
TALK WITH HIM.”**



the moment, two years into Hurdle’s tenure, that the manager decided to make what he calls “a lane change”—to “recognize that there was a way the game was going, and it was going to go with me or without me.”

Coming off a second straight losing season, Huntington and Hurdle were looking for answers when they met a week after the 2012 season at Hurdle’s home in Hampton, Pa. A state-of-the-organization discussion eventually turned into a conversation about the Pirates’ coaching staff embracing analytics.

Every team in baseball now has some form of an analytics department (the Phillies being the last to capitulate after the

2013 season). The scouts vs. stats dichotomy, a narrative made famous by *Moneyball* a decade ago, doesn’t really exist in baseball anymore. Every team to some degree is marrying scouting information with analytics. The challenge for teams is no longer in the quest for the best data but rather in the communication between the front office and the coaching staff. A club could have a number-crunching army with the brain power of a billion-dollar hedge fund, and it wouldn’t matter if the manager viewed the geeks as an intrusion into the coaching staff’s domain. In his first two years with the franchise Hurdle “got his feet wet,” as he describes it, meeting regularly with Fox, but during his meeting with Huntington, Hurdle decided it was time to go “all-in.” “It was time for me to say, ‘You know what, your guys are our guys,’” he says. “‘I want them involved.’”

At the start of the 2013 season Hurdle took it further than anyone imagined: He insisted that Fox and analyst Mike Fitzgerald be present in the coaching room for every advance scouting meeting. At least one of the two would travel with the team, and if they were not in on a meeting in person, they would be on speaker phone. Not only are their voices heard on roster decisions, but they are also part of the coaching staff’s day-to-day decision making. The clearest manifestation has been the Pirates’ embrace of defensive shifts—they increased their use of shifts in ’13 by 400% and last year ranked sixth in baseball—but analytics have also had a clear impact on the pitching staff. Under pitching coach Ray Searage, Pittsburgh has become a Lourdes for pitchers, with veteran hurlers like Francisco Liriano, Edinson Volquez, A.J. Burnett and Vance Worley finding new success in the Steel City. “As far as we’re concerned, [Fox and Fitzgerald] are part of the coaching staff, and they are awesome,” says Searage.

It might not be possible to find another organization in which the front office and coaching staff work together as seamlessly as in Pittsburgh. “Clint’s willingness to learn is one of his great strengths,” says Huntington. “You’re talking about a guy with a number of years in the dugout who could very easily be the old-school guy that’s done it for a number of years and has his own way. He’s the exact opposite. He’s always hungering to find ways to make everyone better.”

THE SUBJECT in the professor’s office has turned to great leaders; Hurdle has been obsessed with this subject lately. This winter he finished off every book written by the pastor John C. Maxwell, and he did a deep dive on Wooden, reading biographies and watching every documentary he could get his hands on. “Let me tell you something,” Hurdle is now saying, “Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* was one of the great alltime leaders.”

Hurdle is physically imposing, still carrying a football player’s build (out of Merritt High School in Florida he had a scholarship to play quarterback at Miami), and with his

2015 MLB PREVIEW CLINT HURDLE

booming baritone, which would scatter a sidewalk of pigeons, you want to buy whatever the man is selling, even when he's comparing Dorothy Gale to George Patton. "She took three people that were missing something and had them look back inside themselves to find something they thought they never had," he says. "She wanted to go home, that was mission No. 1, but in the end it was all about everyone else."

Every month autograph seekers still send Hurdle a dozen copies of the 1978 *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* issue with him on the cover, being hailed as "This Year's Phenom." It was a cover that changed his life, and not for the better. "It is what it is," he says. "I look at that cat, and I'd love to sit down and have a talk with him." After Hurdle failed to live up to the expectations, "there were a number of things that I had to let go of and get over, just because I'd hung on to a lot of things too long. Not being the player everyone thought I should be. Getting the tag of unlimited potential early on, I thought I was bulletproof and was one of those guys that took for granted doing well, and beat myself up when I didn't."

"I've had to be challenged in this game. There probably hasn't been an emotion that hasn't crossed my lap."

The humbling in Kansas City, and again three decades later in Colorado, where he was fired just two years after leading the team to the World Series, has, he will tell you, shaped him into the man who can relate to every kind of player. And that ability has turned even the most analytical minds in the Pirates' organization into believers in the unquantifiable but real power of leadership from the manager's chair. "I will argue that things that take place before seven o'clock and after 10 o'clock are more important than actually what happens during a game," says Huntington. "There are a lot of people who could manage baseball games and make the right tactical decisions, but the ability to understand how to reach different players, motivate a staff and work with a front office and ownership and the media, not many can do that." Says Fox, "There are so many things that I think differently about since my *Baseball Prospectus* days, but certainly the impact that a manager has on the culture of a clubhouse would be near the top."



STAR TURN

Hurdle is philosophical about his newfound popularity, borrowing from the brilliance of everyone from Nietzsche to McCutchen to transform the Pirates.



"I WILL ARGUE THAT THINGS THAT HAPPEN BEFORE SEVEN O'CLOCK AND AFTER 10 ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ACTUALLY WHAT HAPPENS DURING A GAME."



For much of last season the Pirates wondered whether their manager would even make it through the season. Hurdle's hip began to give out a year ago—by midsummer it was "cartilage on cartilage and the worst physical pain I've ever been in," he says. He went as far as to tell the Pirates' front office to come up with a contingency plan. "There were days where I had to say, if there's another day like this, I'm out," he says.

He powered through, much like his team, which was decimated by injuries—Pittsburgh lost three fifths of its rotation to the disabled list, saw stars Andrew McCutchen and Russell Martin shelved for several weeks and still reached the post-season for a second straight year. "We dug one out of the dirt last year," Hurdle says and nods to that Nietzsche quote above him: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."

Hurdle had two hip surgeries this winter, and the limp he'll take out onto the practice field on this morning in Bradenton suggests that his days in the manager's seat may be numbered. But while his 57-year-old body may be betraying him, he has never felt more invigorated with the promise of a new season and, with what he calls the most talented team he's had in Pittsburgh, the possibility of a World Series ring. "I was reading a lot of Wooden this winter," he says. "Something he said really struck me: When your past becomes more significant than your future, you're done. That's Wooden at 92 years old, and it was a lightning bolt for me this winter, because at my age I'm thinking, Wow, what's in front of me still? Running out of time, right now, that's not even a thought for me."

There is still so much left to learn. □



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Photography by Brigitte Lacombe

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H

HERE HE comes again, full bore, the only gear he knows, like the baseball version of a top fuel car. When Bryce Harper answers a question, just as when he chases a fly ball to a wall or zooms helmetless around the base paths—with the most vigorously windblown hair since Pete Rose’s—he fairly leaves in his wake the aromas of spent nitromethane, burned rubber and exhaust smoke, which is to say, he wears the scent of danger like cologne.

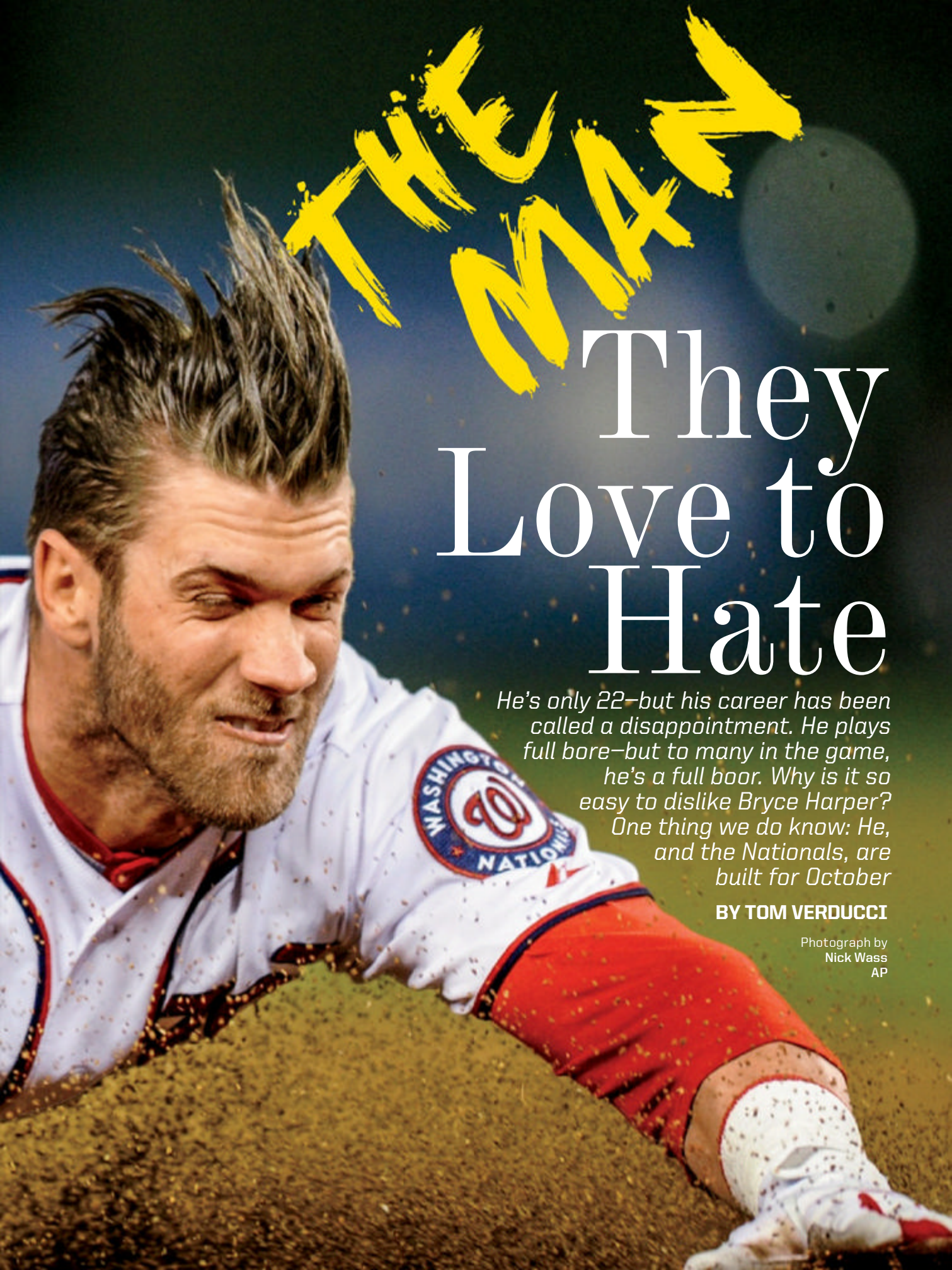
“You’ve got to have the confidence to win the World

Series,” the Nationals rightfielder says, seated on a folding chair on the warning track near first base after a spring training workout at Space Coast Stadium in Viera, Fla. “I truly believe if we’re hitting on all cylinders and guys do what they need to do, we’ll win, plain and simple.

“Am I saying that it’s going to be easy for us? No. But do we have the confidence? One hundred percent. You have to. I don’t care if you pick us to win the World Series or not. [Editor’s note: We’re not.] Every day when you get out of your car and walk into the park you better have that chip on your shoulder, that confidence to believe, We’re the best team in baseball.” [Editor’s note: They are.]

Like Woolworth’s, Standard Oil, the Soviet Union and the Rolling Stones, the Nationals reek of an old-world superpower. In an age of parity when no team has won 100 games since the 2011 Phillies—the longest such drought over full seasons in the history of the 162-game schedule—and when starting pitching has been de-emphasized in favor of a bottomless supply of hard-throwing relievers, Washington,





THE MAN

They Love to Hate

He's only 22—but his career has been called a disappointment. He plays full bore—but to many in the game, he's a full boor. Why is it so easy to dislike Bryce Harper? One thing we do know: He, and the Nationals, are built for October

BY TOM VERDUCCI

Photograph by
Nick Wass
AP

2015 MLB PREVIEW BRYCE HARPER

which led the National League with 96 wins last year, looms as exceptional. It has assembled five elite starters: Max Scherzer, Stephen Strasburg, Jordan Zimmermann, Doug Fister and Gio Gonzalez.

The free-agent signing of Scherzer prompted another infamous incendiarism from Harper on the day the outfielder reported to camp: “I was like, Where’s my ring?” After all, last year the Nats’ starting staff joined the 2011 Phillies’ as the only ones in baseball history with four times as many strikeouts as walks in at least 1,000 innings—and now Washington has added the ’13 American League Cy Young Award winner, who over the past two years led the majors in strikeouts and tied for the lead in wins. Only 28 pitchers have won 15 games with an ERA of 3.25 or better in any of the past three seasons, and the Nationals have hoarded six of them, including Tanner Roark, whom Scherzer bumped from the rotation.

And yet, the most critical player in Washington’s World Series plan is a 22-year-old who in 1,489 major league plate appearances has never faced a pitcher younger than himself, has never driven in 60 runs and has missed 35% of his team’s games since running face-first into a wall in May 2013. Harper, who most often batted sixth and played left last season, graduates to the third spot and rightfield this year. And because of the departure of first baseman Adam LaRoche, who signed with the White Sox, he represents the lineup’s lone lefthanded power threat.

Despite their superb pitching last year, the Nationals flunked out of the playoffs because of a lack of clutch hitting, a seasonlong flaw waiting to be exposed. Washington had a 1.23 ERA against the Giants in the NL Division Series, but lost by one run three times in four games while hitting .164. In 2014 the Nats struck out more than any other winning team in the majors, ranked 11th in the NL in hitting with runners in scoring position (.242) and tied the ’12 Reds as the worst-hitting team with two outs and runners in scoring position (.198) among all division winners since 1969.

The Nationals, who also fielded a stellar rotation in 2012 (when they won 98 games but lost in the Division Series), know full well that having elite starters does not necessarily translate into a title. Over the past nine years, the team that led the NL in starters’ ERA has played .355 baseball in the postseason in those seasons—11–20, the equivalent of a 104-loss year—while losing six of seven series.

Hitting third—or possibly fourth when leftfielder Jayson Werth recovers from shoulder surgery—Harper inherits more responsibility for not letting all that superior pitching go to waste again. And yet, he is a career .234 hitter with runners in scoring position, including .186 with two outs.

“I guess there’s a little bit of pressure, but I put more pres-

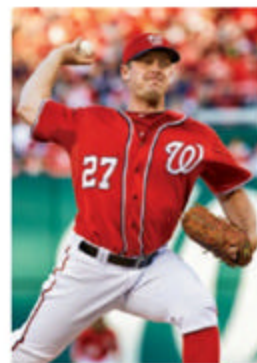


HOARD MENTALITY

Over the last three seasons 18 starters have thrown 450 innings with an ERA of 3.25 or lower. The Nats have five of them (left to right).

LOWEST ERA, 2012–14

5th	JORDAN ZIMMERMANN	2.96
12th	STEPHEN STRASBURG	3.10
14th	DOUG FISTER	3.22
16th	MAX SCHERZER	3.24
18th	GIO GONZALEZ	3.25



sure on myself than anybody,” Harper says. “I’m not scared of it. I’m not scared to be the only lefty power hitter. I want to do damage. That’s what I want to do.”

THIS IS Harper’s fourth big league season. Because of injuries caused by high-velocity collisions—twice running into walls and once spraining his thumb diving headfirst for a triple—he has never made 600 plate appearances. (He had 597 in his rookie year, when he hit 22 home runs with 59 RBIs, still career highs.) So the lineup fulcrum for the presumptive best team in baseball remains something of an unknown even among those closest to him.

When asked if he knew what Harper could produce over a full year, Washington general manager Mike Rizzo says,

GEORGE BUREN/USA TODAY (HARPER); ALTHEA/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ZIMMERMANN, SCHERZER); GUY LAWRENCE/GETTY IMAGES (STRASBURG); GUY LAWRENCE/GETTY IMAGES (FISTER); BRAD MANNING/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (GONZALEZ)



underwhelming since his arrival in the big league [sic].”

Underwhelming? In 2012, his only healthy season—at age 19, in what for most people would have been freshman year of college—Harper set major league records for a teenager in total bases (254), extra-base hits (57) and WAR (5.1). And even with the two injury-shortened seasons that followed, Harper is only the sixth player in history with 50 homers and 30 steals through his age-21 season, joining Orlando Cepeda, Ken Griffey Jr., Alex Rodriguez, Andruw Jones and Mike Trout.

Harper was hitting .303 on May 13, 2013, when he crashed into the rightfield wall at Dodger Stadium with the Nationals leading 6–0. He hit .226 over the next two weeks before finally going on the disabled list with pain and swelling in his left knee. He sat out all of June, hit .212 in his first three weeks after the layoff, and though he hit .284 thereafter, required off-season knee surgery.

POWER TO FORGET

Despite losing much time to injuries, Harper hit more homers through his age-21 season (55) than all but five players since 1969.

A similar scenario occurred last year: a fast start (.289 on April 25) derailed by a collision injury (those torn thumb ligaments), followed by a lengthy DL stay (57 games), followed by rust (.220 in his first 35 games back), followed by a strong finish (.305 over his final 43 games).

Harper's best months are his healthiest: April and September. If you prorated his career numbers from those two months over 150 games, you get a .306 hitter with 25 home runs and 67 RBIs—all for a player who *still* is younger than all four Rookies of the Year named since he won the award in 2012. Harper is younger than Cubs phenom Kris Bryant

(who, at 23, has yet to play a day in the majors).

Says Nationals centerfielder Denard Span, “He’s been through a lot at a young age. But I know what I saw last year in the playoffs: I saw a man. I saw someone step up and put the team on his back.”

Harper hit three home runs in the four games against San Francisco, giving him four career postseason homers through age 21—matching Mickey Mantle, Miguel Cabrera and Jones as the only young sluggers with that many. And yet *no doubt underwhelming* and worse follow him. He runs into walls (though Williams did bench him last year for not running out a routine grounder), shares a fun personality on social media and helps promote the game as one of the few players with national endorsement deals. Still, people are quick to vilify him, including Mets pitcher Zack Wheeler (career record: 18–16), who in early March told the New York *Daily News*, “I guarantee you we all saw what Bryce Harper said. He said, ‘Give me my ring.’”

“I don’t think I do. I’m really anxious to see what he can put up with a healthy season.”

Answers manager Matt Williams, “I think he’s ready to hit in the middle of the order. With 600 plate appearances, I think he’s capable of driving in 100. I really don’t know as far as the home runs. I do know that when he hits them he hits them in bunches.”

Harper, given the same question about his potential production, leaves the bat on his shoulders.

“I go into every single year knowing if I go out there and play hard and bust my butt, that will take care of it,” he says. “I don’t need to go, C’mon, just give me one full year! I know how hard I work to get ready. People are going to say what they want.”

Here’s what Neil Greenberg of *The Washington Post* wrote about him on Feb. 25: “Bryce Harper is the face of the Washington Nationals, but there can be no doubt he has been

2015 MLB PREVIEW BRYCE HARPER

Actually, that's not what he said, but on the Richter scale of reaction Harper's comments still blew away the stillness that reigned when Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo, on the heels of the franchise's five straight last-place finishes, promised Chicago would win the NL Central. Was Harper surprised at the backlash?

"No, because it was me," he says. "Was it meant for harsh remarks? Was I going after somebody? No. Seriously, if you have a staff of five Cy Young candidates, what else are you going to say?"

"I don't care. If you don't like me because I'm in the other dugout, so be it. I don't like you, either. We'll be friends off the field, but I want to kick your teeth in on the field no matter what."

How is it that Harper can tick off people with playful comments?

"Because you wrote a story when I was 16," he says.

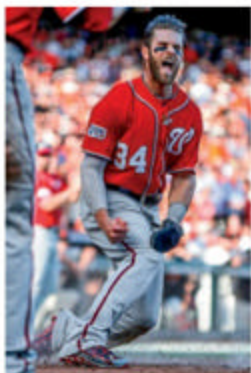
Harper, introduced nationally with an SI cover story in 2009, is the rare baseball player who was famous before he was a professional—a star before he put up a star's numbers.

"I mean, it's just some of the things I do," he continues. "I'm very genuine with what I say. It's not like I go out there

and I'm an ass. Maybe on the field and between the lines I am. Walking out of the clubhouse, I feel like I'm one of the nicest guys you'll meet. If I say something it's because of the confidence I have in my team, not because I want to be in the media attention.

"Maybe I've been hurt the past two years and haven't lived up to everything people think I should live up to. But I'd rather piss people off playing hard than piss people off playing soft."

LIKE HARPER, the Nationals labor under the burdens of great attention and promise. Last year they won their division by 17 games, the most of any team. They have 280 victories in the past three years—tops in the majors—but have not taken a postseason series in that span, making them the only NL team in the wild-card era to lead the majors in wins over any three-year period while getting skunked in the playoffs. Viewed as a city, not as a franchise, Washington has waited longer in between World



LOUD AND PROUD

Harper (above, after scoring in the '14 Division Series), doesn't shy from being a franchise face.



WHEN HE GOT TO CAMP, HARPER DESCRIBED HIS REACTION TO THE SCHERZER SIGNING: "I WAS LIKE, WHERE'S MY RING?"



Series titles—91 years since the 1924 Senators won it all—than any current major league metropolis.

The presumptive favorites are not without cracks. Werth and Span (abdominal surgery) could miss part or all of the first month of the season. Veteran third baseman Ryan Zimmerman is learning to play first. Shortstop Yunel Escobar, who was slowed by an oblique injury in spring training, is learning how to play second. Span, Zimmermann, Fister and shortstop Ian Desmond are all potential free agents after the season. And Harper, cast in the middle of the order, gets greater responsibility, a role he admits will require more discipline at the plate.

"Thing is, I've hit pitches out of the zone before and taken them to left-center 380 feet," he says. "So I feel like every time I see the same pitch I can do the same thing. But if I can lay off that pitch two inches off the plate I can get another one that may be better."

Harper wants to believe that what comes next for him actually began with his last at bat of last season. "My favorite one of the year," he calls it. With Washington down to its final out in the top of the ninth, trailing the Giants 3–2 in Game 4, Harper faced closer Santiago Casilla. He fell behind 0 and 2. He took three pitches for balls, fouled one off, then took a breaking ball for a seven-pitch walk.

Harper remembers thinking, If I can have that at bat in front of 50,000 people in a playoff atmosphere, why can't I do that in the regular season too? He took it as a sign he is ready for something bigger. For in that moment of stillness, Harper could be as dangerous as ever. □

A person wearing a blue helmet, a grey long-sleeved shirt, and red pants is rappelling down a dark, textured rock face. They are holding a rope with both hands and have their feet secured with rappelling shoes. The background is a dense forest with green foliage.

We're the
stronger than we look Type.

The braver than you think Type.

The Type that will stop at nothing,
absolutely nothing...

until type one becomes
typenone

Type 1 diabetes (T1D) is an autoimmune disease, unrelated to diet or lifestyle, that creates a lifelong dependence on injected insulin. Affecting both children and adults, it carries the constant burden of life-threatening complications and never-ending management.

But JDRF has a plan to change all that. As the largest non-profit funder of T1D research in the world, we're working to deliver life-improving therapies until we can put an end to T1D entirely. But we need your help.

Together, we will
create a world without
type 1 diabetes.

Join us now at JDRF.org

JDRF IMPROVING
LIVES.
CURING
TYPE 1
DIABETES.

How They'll Finish

AL EAST	W-L	GB
1. RED SOX	89-73	—
2. BLUE JAYS	84-78	5
3. ORIOLES	82-80	7
4. YANKEES	77-85	12
5. RAYS	74-88	15

AL CENTRAL	W-L	GB
1. INDIANS	92-70	—
2. TIGERS	87-75	5
3. WHITE SOX	83-79	9
4. ROYALS	78-84	14
5. TWINS	67-95	25

AL WEST	W-L	GB
1. MARINERS	95-67	—
2. ANGELS	92-70	3
3. A'S	81-81	14
4. RANGERS	73-89	22
5. ASTROS	72-90	23

NL EAST	W-L	GB
1. NATIONALS	99-63	—
2. MARLINS	85-77	14
3. METS	82-80	17
4. BRAVES	71-91	28
5. PHILLIES	63-99	36

NL CENTRAL	W-L	GB
1. CARDINALS	91-71	—
2. PIRATES	88-74	3
3. CUBS	82-80	9
4. BREWERS	74-88	17
5. REDS	73-89	18

NL WEST	W-L	GB
1. DODGERS	95-67	—
2. GIANTS	84-78	11
3. PADRES	83-79	12
4. ROCKIES	69-93	26
5. DIAMONDBACKS	65-97	30

MODEST PROPOSALS

By Joe Sheehan

BOURN READY

Now more than ever, expect the unexpected in October. So prepare yourselves, Cleveland—the Indians will scamper off with their first championship since 1948.

Photograph by
Hannah Foslien
Getty Images





POSTSEASON PREDICTIONS

AL WILD-CARD GAME
TIGERS *over* ANGELS

NL WILD-CARD GAME
PIRATES *over* MARLINS

AL DIVISION SERIES
MARINERS *over* TIGERS
INDIANS *over* RED SOX

NL DIVISION SERIES
NATIONALS *over* PIRATES
DODGERS *over* CARDINALS

AL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES
INDIANS *over* MARINERS

NL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES
NATIONALS *over* DODGERS

WORLD SERIES

INDIANS *over* NATIONALS

HANLEY
RAMIREZ



2015 MLB PREVIEW

AL

EAST

RICK PORCELLO

BOSTON
RED SOX

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE RED SOX

The Red Sox can win the division because the whole division has holes. This is the worst AL East I've ever seen. . . . There's no No. 1 starter, no No. 2. **Clay Buchholz** is a zero; he's got no tiger in him. I don't see that in his makeup at all. . . . **Joe Kelly** is a teaser. His stuff is good enough, but like Buchholz, he's never seized an upper-level role. . . . **Rick Porcello** is a 4. He can be better, but not much. He's a sinkerball guy, and this team will catch the ball better than Detroit did, which won't be hard. . . . **Justin Masterson** has an average fastball and breaking ball. If he gets some velocity back, he moves up to a 3. . . . I'm excited about **Henry Owens** and **Eduardo Rodriguez**, two kids who can help them down the stretch, but they need to pitch at least half a year in the minors. . . . **Pablo Sandoval** is not in as bad shape as people think. He'll be fine in the middle of the order. . . . The Fenway fans are unforgiving, so if **Hanley Ramirez** screws up in leftfield, the question is whether he will go into a shell. I think he'll be fine. . . . **Mookie Betts** is a better offensive player than **Rusney Castillo** right now. Betts should start in centerfield but shift to right eventually. . . . They're working with **Xander Bogaerts** to make more contact and use the whole field. He's a work in progress, but I think he'll be a productive shortstop. . . . **Christian Vazquez** is a very solid catch-and-throw guy behind the plate. . . . Their bullpen is sketchy. **Koji Uehara** looks healthy but old. His velocity is down, so he'll have to throw more splits than ever.

LEAGUE
RANK

4

MANAGER **JOHN FARRELL**
3RD SEASON WITH RED SOX

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
RF	MOOKIE BETTS					
R-R	.290	.363	.444	12	50	20
2B	DUSTIN PEDROIA					
R-R	.288	.351	.407	10	65	12
DH	DAVID ORTIZ					
L-L	.277	.373	.495	26	88	0
LF	HANLEY RAMIREZ					
R-R	.291	.363	.498	21	84	11
3B	PABLO SANDOVAL					
S-R	.284	.337	.445	19	81	0
CF	RUSNEY CASTILLO (R)					
R-R	.282	.341	.398	15	56	19
1B	MIKE NAPOLI					
R-R	.256	.376	.467	22	65	1
SS	XANDER BOGAERTS					
R-R	.254	.316	.389	15	61	6
C	CHRISTIAN VAZQUEZ					
R-R	.266	.319	.365	3	26	0

BENCH

OF	ALLEN CRAIG					
R-R	.266	.328	.397	12	71	2
OF	SHANE VICTORINO					
R-R	.275	.330	.430	7	35	14

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	CLAY BUCHHOLZ			
10	4.35	1.29	7.1	
RH	RICK PORCELLO			
14	3.68	1.23	6.1	
RH	JUSTIN MASTERSON			
8	4.69	1.42	8.2	
LH	WADE MILEY			
10	4.32	1.40	7.0	
RH	JOE KELLY			
11	3.77	1.32	6.0	
	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	KOJI UEHARA			
34	2.44	0.90	10.8	
RH	EDWARD MUJICA			
3	3.77	1.31	6.5	

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

The signings of **Hanley Ramirez** and **Pablo Sandoval** made the Red Sox better, but they created a roster crunch in the outfield. Ramirez, **Rusney Castillo** and **Mookie Betts** are the potential starters, leaving **Shane Victorino**, **Allen Craig** and **Daniel Nava** on the bench.

That doesn't even account for **Jackie Bradley Jr.**, one of the best defensive centerfielders in the game, being ticketed for the minors because of his plate struggles. What the Sox could use is another lefthanded bat and some depth at catcher, where **Christian Vazquez** and **Ryan Hanigan** are holding on until prospect **Blake Swihart** is ready. What about a disappointing-prospect swap that sends Bradley to Houston in exchange for Jason Castro? The Astros would get a cost-controlled piece to shore up a below-average defense, while Castro would help balance the Sox' lineup and bolster their weakest position. It seems clear that Boston has no role for Bradley with the emergence of Betts.



Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE BLUE JAYS

Every team has a flaw. The bullpen is theirs. . . . Your best value for **Aaron Sanchez** is as a starter. There's no doubt about his stuff. It's just a matter of getting around in the league, and in **Russell Martin** he's got one of the best catchers to teach him how to approach it. . . . **Daniel Norris** is the same way. Like all young guys now, they'll have innings limits, but if it was me, I'd run them out there and just say, Here you go. . . . They're gonna hit. **Jose Reyes** looks outstanding. He's running well. He's playing great defense. He looks to me like he looked with the Mets. . . . Martin is a huge addition. When guys put the right fingers down and they're prepared, I can't tell you how much that adds to your team. He can hit anywhere you want in the lineup. He can catch **R.A. Dickey**'s knuckleball. . . . **Josh Donaldson**'s one of those guys, I call him a lay-in-the-weeds guy. He's down there around the 5 or 6 hole, and you get through **Jose Bautista** and **Edwin Encarnacion**, then you make a mistake with a fastball and this guy's going to hurt you. . . . I think that **Dalton Pompey**'s one of the best-kept secrets here. He's a switch-hitter, above-average defense. He's going to be a very nice piece for them, but they don't know how he's going to react to the bright lights and the varsity pitching. It's an awful big jump. . . . **Justin Smoak** is on my list of guys who are overrated. He's a switch-hitter and his bat is slow from both sides. He's just ordinary, real ordinary.

LEAGUE
RANK

6

MANAGER **JOHN GIBBONS**
3RD SEASON WITH BLUE JAYS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
SS	JOSE REYES					
S-R	.288	.332	.406	10	52	29
C	RUSSELL MARTIN					
R-R	.254	.363	.406	14	61	6
RF	JOSE BAUTISTA					
R-R	.272	.383	.517	36	99	5
1B	EDWIN ENCARNACION					
R-R	.271	.363	.542	36	102	3
3B	JOSH DONALDSON					
R-R	.270	.352	.485	30	93	5
LF	MICHAEL SAUNDERS					
L-R	.248	.324	.412	11	42	7
DH	JUSTIN SMOAK					
S-L	.241	.322	.423	16	45	0
2B	MAICER IZTURIS					
S-R	.246	.298	.310	2	15	1
CF	DALTON POMPEY (R)					
S-R	.252	.288	.357	5	36	30

BENCH

3B	DANNY VALENCIA					
R-R	.261	.293	.408	5	28	1
C	DIONER NAVARRO					
S-R	.280	.328	.427	8	34	1

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	R.A. DICKEY			
	15	3.89	1.24	7.5
LH	MARK BUEHRLE			
	12	3.86	1.32	5.6
RH	DREW HUTCHISON			
	13	4.05	1.29	9.0
RH	AARON SANCHEZ (R)			
	8	3.98	1.40	7.4
RH	MARCO ESTRADA			
	6	4.09	1.16	8.1
	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
LH	BRETT CECIL			
	25	3.16	1.30	11.1
LH	AARON LOUP			
	6	3.09	1.21	7.5

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

JOSH
DONALDSON



Modest Proposal

The Blue Jays made a slew of moves this winter in an effort to get over the top in the AL East, but they still opened camp trying to plug a hole at second base. Veterans **Maicer Izturis** and **Munenori Kawasaki** and incumbent **Ryan Goins** are all candidates for the job. The Jays could use a real offensive boost from the position, and better still if that boost comes from a lefthanded hitter, improving their lineup balance. Trading for the Mets' Daniel Murphy, an impending free agent, would give Toronto an above-average hitter who fits nicely in either the second or sixth lineup spot, and a high-average doubles hitter to complement the walks-and-power core of **Jose Bautista**, **Edwin Encarnacion** and **Josh Donaldson**. The Mets have a rising second base prospect in Dilson Herrera and little interest in re-signing Murphy, so the price should be reasonable—say a live arm like Class A fireballer **Miguel Castro**.

BALTIMORE
ORIOLES

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE ORIOLES

Why does everyone always overlook this team? They won the division by 12 games, they did it without **Manny Machado** and **Matt Wieters** most of the season and **Chris Davis** had a terrible year. Everyone criticized them all winter for not making any moves, but they've got Machado and Wieters coming back, and Davis should be much better. . . . With Machado, you always worry about the legs—but his legs are under him, and he's hitting the ball with authority, moving around well at third base, where he's going to be a Gold Glove defender again. I wouldn't put it past him that he goes back and plays shortstop. . . . Davis looks sluggish and burly, but the big thing is that he's allowed to take his ADHD medication again. Is he going to hit 53 home runs again? No, but I could easily see 35–40. . . . People seem to think that Wieters is a disappointment because of all the hype early on, but he's so important to this team. We all thought that he should get out from behind the plate because he's so big and tall, but his defense is so, so good. . . . They lost Andrew Miller, but the bullpen is still going to be a strength. **Zach Britton** has found himself as a closer; they shouldn't ever think about him as a starter anymore—he's finally harnessed his stuff and can dominate just with his fastball. . . . The starters are an underrated bunch. **Kevin Gausman** could be a really good No. 2 starter. **Bud Norris**, **Wei-Yin Chen**, **Chris Tillman** and **Miguel Gonzalez** are nothing sexy, but they get the job done.

2015 MLB
PREVIEW

AL

EAST

MANNY
MACHADO

LEAGUE
RANK

8

MANAGER **BUCK SHOWALTER**
6TH SEASON WITH ORIOLES

B-T BA OBP SLG HR RBI SB

LF	ALEJANDRO DE AZA
L-L	.261 .322 .392 10 43 16
3B	MANNY MACHADO
R-R	.278 .319 .438 17 75 6
CF	ADAM JONES
R-R	.282 .315 .483 31 102 8
1B	CHRIS DAVIS
L-R	.234 .323 .474 35 95 2
C	MATT WIETERS
S-R	.251 .315 .432 19 70 0
DH	STEVE PEARCE
R-R	.273 .348 .475 18 65 4
SS	J.J. HARDY
R-R	.264 .309 .400 15 68 0
RF	TRAVIS SNIDER
L-L	.246 .316 .413 13 41 3
2B	JONATHAN SCHOOP
R-R	.230 .279 .389 20 62 3

BENCH

C	CALEB JOSEPH
R-R	.214 .271 .352 6 21 0
SS	EVERTH CABRERA
S-R	.253 .312 .333 3 24 29

W ERA WHIP K/9

RH	CHRIS TILLMAN
13	3.47 1.21 7.0
LH	WEI-YIN CHEN
13	3.77 1.26 6.8
RH	KEVIN GAUSMAN
10	3.66 1.22 8.3
RH	BUD NORRIS
12	3.97 1.33 7.7
RH	MIGUEL GONZALEZ
11	3.33 1.24 6.5

SV ERA WHIP K/9

LH	ZACH BRITTON
40	2.31 1.03 7.7
RH	DARREN O'DAY
2	1.91 0.94 9.3

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Just a year after signing a four-year, \$50 million contract, **Ubaldo Jimenez** is now the Orioles' sixth-best starter. The righthander was terrible last season, with a 4.81 ERA in 125⅓ innings. Baltimore can do better. Manager Buck Showalter and pitching coach Dave Wallace have had success converting starters into relievers of late: They turned **Zach Britton** into a closer with a 1.65 ERA last season and have gotten two good years—a 2.88 ERA in 147 innings in 2013 and '14—from **Tommy Hunter** in setup and closing roles. Jimenez might need the move; he's lost 2 mph off his fastball in three years, averaging a career-low 92.3 last season, and has been leaning more and more on his slider and splitter. A move to the bullpen, which for most pitchers usually leads to increased velocity, may be the only way the Orioles can get a return on their investment.

NEW YORK
YANKEES

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE YANKEES

Welcome to the *if* club: *If Masahiro Tanaka's arm doesn't fall off, if CC Sabathia turns back the clock to 2011, if Michael Pineda stays healthy, if Adam Warren steps up.* . . . Tanaka has looked very good this spring—his velocity is down, but in one spring start he threw six or seven wipeout splits that were unhittable. Of course, you're playing Russian roulette every time he throws the ball. . . . I can't believe it: They lost David Robertson, but their bullpen is actually better. **Andrew Miller** is an absolute stud. It wouldn't surprise me if **Dellin Betances** is one of the best closers in the game this year. . . . I have to say, **Alex Rodriguez** has been a pleasant surprise. He's been having good at bats, and he can still do some damage on mistakes over the plate. At third he's got limited range, but he still has good hands and can throw. He's taking the boos, running out ground balls, and you know what? He's a piece of crap—but he's winning me over. . . . **Mark Teixeira** is a big problem. He has not looked good with the bat at all, his bat speed has slowed down so much that he has to really cheat to get to fastballs. . . . I think **Brian McCann** will bounce back. It was clear he was trying to justify the money they spent on him, and he was pressing at the plate. He's a good hitter and a good fit in the ballpark. . . . The division is up for grabs, so they'll hang around. I will say that there are finally some good young prospects to get excited about—**Luis Severino**, **Aaron Judge**, **Greg Bird**—so help is on the way.



MASAHIRO
TANAKA

LEAGUE
RANK

11

MANAGER **JOE GIRARDI**
8TH SEASON WITH YANKEES

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
CF	JACOBY ELLSBURY					
L-L	.282	.337	.420	13	62	43
LF	BRETT GARDNER					
L-L	.264	.339	.428	15	55	26
RF	CARLOS BELTRAN					
S-R	.264	.323	.455	21	69	4
3B	CHASE HEADLEY					
S-R	.259	.348	.432	19	69	9
DH	ALEX RODRIGUEZ					
R-R	.265	.346	.437	14	44	1
C	BRIAN MCCANN					
L-R	.256	.318	.447	25	71	0
1B	MARK TEIXEIRA					
S-R	.235	.327	.448	26	78	2
2B	STEPHEN DREW					
L-R	.211	.292	.369	9	40	2
SS	DIDI GREGORIUS					
L-R	.248	.315	.368	5	31	2

BENCH

1B	GARRETT JONES
L-L	.246 .305 .423 16 57 1
SS	BRENDAN RYAN
R-R	.190 .256 .255 2 17 3

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
LH	CC SABATHIA			
11	4.48	1.36	7.4	
RH	MASAHIRO TANAKA			
12	3.28	1.14	8.7	
RH	MICHAEL PINEDA			
11	3.25	1.07	7.6	
RH	NATHAN EOVALDI			
7	3.97	1.27	7.0	
RH	ADAM WARREN			
3	3.12	1.23	8.2	
SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9	
RH	DELLIN BETANCES			
41	2.54	0.99	12.2	
LH	ANDREW MILLER			
5	2.44	0.98	14.3	

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

The way to get the most from **Alex Rodriguez** is to look to . . . Derek Jeter? Rodriguez, coming back from nearly two years lost to injury and suspension, is still under contract through 2017 for \$61 million, so the Yankees have to find a way to get value from the 39-year-old. Their best option may be to have him succeed Jeter as the number 2 hitter. Rodriguez could split the lefty bats of **Jacoby Ellsbury** and **Brett Gardner**, and as a fly ball hitter he would present a lessened double play risk. For all the focus on his home runs, Rodriguez has historically hit for average (.299 for his career) and is able to drive the ball over the whole field. It's not hard to see him working counts and hitting singles to right that move the speedy Ellsbury to third base. At the least, Rodriguez would most likely improve on the .316 OBP and .345 slugging the Yankees got from their number 2 hitters, mostly Jeter, a year ago.



EVAN LONGORIA

TAMPA BAY
RAYS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE RAYS

They're gonna struggle to score runs, but once **Matt Moore** gets back in May or June, you're talking about the best rotation in the AL. . . . You never want to say anyone's like Greg Maddux, but when you watch **Alex Cobb** pitch—any pitch in any count and great command. . . . **Chris Archer**'s got a mid-90s fastball, a plus slider. His overall stuff is probably better than Cobb's. You see the maturity; he's harnessing his emotions a little more. . . . **Drew Smyly** changes speeds, throws strikes and keeps the hitters off-balance. . . . **Jake McGee** has easy, plus velocity. He comes right at you with the fastball, and batters don't get good swings on it. They gave him a chance to close and he jumped on it. . . . The question is, Who's going to play shortstop? I'm thinking **Asdrubal Cabrera**. He's going to have to rely on scouting reports and positioning because he's lost a step, but he's played it and he's got good hands. . . . They're kind of waiting on **Desmond Jennings**. They want to hide him down in the lineup a little bit, take the pressure off him. He's having a great camp, squaring a lot of balls up. . . . **Kevin Kiermaier** is a good defensive player. He's got great quickness in centerfield, above-average instincts. But the defense is definitely ahead of the bat right now. . . . **Steven Souza** has power, he can run. It's just a question of, Is this guy gonna hit? He's a high-strikeout guy. He's hit at Triple A, but he's got some holes on the inner half with the breaking ball.

LEAGUE
RANK

12

MANAGER **KEVIN CASH**
1ST SEASON WITH RAYS

B-T BA OBP SLG HR RBI SB

CF KEVIN KIERMAIER
L-R .266 .322 .416 11 40 12

DH JOHN JASO
L-R .268 .361 .419 7 35 3

3B EVAN LONGORIA
R-R .269 .340 .464 26 87 3

RF STEVEN SOUZA (R)
R-R .262 .308 .435 16 56 12

1B JAMES LONEY
L-L .282 .332 .368 8 66 2

2B NICK FRANKLIN
S-R .237 .320 .393 9 35 6

LF DESMOND JENNINGS
R-R .248 .325 .427 12 44 19

SS ASDRUBAL CABRERA
S-R .248 .315 .400 15 63 9

C RENE RIVERA
R-R .241 .296 .401 6 25 0

BENCH

OF DAVID DEJESUS
L-L .251 .321 .380 6 23 3

IF LOGAN FORSYTHE
R-R .232 .297 .341 6 24 4

W ERA WHIP K/9

RH ALEX COBB
12 3.03 1.15 8.1

RH CHRIS ARCHER
13 3.22 1.22 8.1

LH DREW SMYLY
10 3.26 1.18 8.4

RH JAKE ODORIZZI
12 3.77 1.25 8.9

RH ALEX COLOME
4 3.99 1.46 7.3

SV ERA WHIP K/9

LH JAKE MCGEE
20 2.62 0.96 11.1

RH BRAD BOXBERGER
22 2.71 1.07 12.1

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

In the last 2½ years the Rays have dealt away many of the core pieces from their 2008-13 run, including James Shields, David Price and Ben Zobrist. With Tampa Bay lowering both payroll and expectations, it's time to make one more big deal to set a rebuild into motion—trading **Evan Longoria**. His first team-friendly deal expires after '16, when his six-year, \$100 million extension kicks in. He will represent about 16% of the Rays' payroll this year and could approach or even exceed 20% of it in 2016 and '17. Longoria is still a valuable player, worth more than three wins a year in each of his last three full seasons, but that won't be enough to push the Rays into the postseason the next few years. Trading Longoria can help bolster a Rays farm system that has slipped into the bottom third of baseball after years of poor drafting.

MICHAEL
BRANTLEY



2015 MLB
PREVIEW

AL

CENTRAL

COREY
KLUBER

CLEVELAND
INDIANS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE INDIANS

They're going to contend for the division because they're well-managed, they play hard and their pitching is good. It could be real good. . . . Some people are still going to say, "Who the hell is **Michael Brantley**?" but it was no surprise to us in the scouting profession that he almost won the MVP last year. He might hit more hard line drives than anyone in baseball. . . . **Jason Kipnis** will bounce back. I think the oblique he strained early in the season bothered him all year. He'll get back to hitting maybe 15 homers and stealing 25. . . . **Brandon Moss** is dangerous, especially because the wind blows out to right center in Cleveland. If I was a betting man, I'd bet he will hit 30. . . . **Yan Gomes** has become a good defensive catcher. I think he's an All-Star this year. Somebody should be arrested for the trade that brought him and **Mike Aviles** over from Toronto for **Esmil Rogers**. . . . I like **Nick Swisher**'s energy and all that. But his bat has slowed down. I don't know if he's going to like sitting on the bench, but I think he'll be there a lot. . . . **Corey Kluber**'s curveball sizzles when it comes to the plate. Cutter, slider, fastball, moves it up and down, in and out. Last year was no fluke. . . . I saw **Trevor Bauer** throw. It was more strikes, less the strange things. Better command, and he's not trying to throw 10 different types of pitches anymore. Probably down to about six. He wanted to do it his way, but he's smart enough to know that his way wasn't quite working.

LEAGUE
RANK

3

MANAGER **TERRY FRANCONA**
3RD SEASON WITH INDIANS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
CF	MICHAEL BOURN					
L-R	.261	.322	.367	5	40	19
SS	JOSE RAMIREZ					
S-R	.273	.312	.358	4	34	25
LF	MICHAEL BRANTLEY					
L-L	.307	.361	.465	17	83	19
1B	CARLOS SANTANA					
S-R	.247	.368	.441	24	80	4
2B	JASON KIPNIS					
L-R	.258	.334	.383	12	67	28
C	YAN GOMES					
R-R	.284	.321	.462	19	71	1
DH	BRANDON MOSS					
L-R	.248	.332	.470	24	76	2
RF	NICK SWISHER					
S-R	.236	.320	.390	18	69	0
3B	LONNIE CHISENHALL					
L-R	.274	.329	.434	15	62	2

BENCH

2B	MIKE AVILES					
R-R	.249	.278	.360	8	45	12
OF	DAVID MURPHY					
L-L	.256	.319	.403	11	54	2

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	COREY KLUBER			
15	3.02	1.18	9.5	
RH	CARLOS CARRASCO			
10	3.33	1.12	8.8	
RH	TREVOR BAUER			
9	3.97	1.36	8.8	
RH	DANNY SALAZAR			
9	3.48	1.23	9.4	
RH	T.J. HOUSE			
9	3.51	1.27	6.9	

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	CODY ALLEN			
37	2.35	1.15	11.1	
RH	BRYAN SHAW			
1	2.96	1.16	7.8	

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Buying outfielders has worked poorly for the Indians in recent seasons, as \$116 million in commitments to **Michael Bourn**, **Nick Swisher** and **David Murphy** produced less than six Wins Above Replacement and a single postseason game in two years. While all three are still in Cleveland, their decline (none had a WAR above 1.1 last year) and age (all are at least 32) make them replaceable. One solution is to move **James Ramsey** to the majors. Ramsey, acquired for Justin Masterson last year, is a largely unheralded prospect who could be ready for the majors right now. The Cards' first-round pick in 2012 has hit .272/.368/.464 in 189 games above A ball and projects as a good defensive corner outfielder. He might already be better than Murphy or Swisher, good enough to help the Indians squeeze out an extra win or two in a division in which a win or two could make all the difference.



Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE TIGERS

Their whole season is predicated on their starting pitching, hoping those guys go seven or eight innings and get the ball to **Joakim Soria**, then to **Joe Nathan**. That's how they're going to live. . . . I don't think they're going to miss **Max Scherzer**, because they have **David Price**. . . . **Anibal Sanchez** looks great. Right out of the box, he's got all of his pitches, he's throwing strikes. . . . **Shane Greene** is going to be a nice major league pitcher. He's got a good delivery. He throws a lot of strikes, and he can really manipulate his fastball. He's got a good sinker. . . . The key is **Justin Verlander**. They're really counting on him to make a big comeback. . . . Their weakness is their bullpen. Nathan is real hittable right now. You lose your fastball when you get older, there's not anything you can do about it. Now he can't get away with the same pitches in the same area because he doesn't have the velocity he used to. . . . They're going to have to have confidence in Soria because that's basically all they have. . . . **Miguel Cabrera**'s in the greatest shape I've ever seen him, and I've been seeing him since he was with the Marlins. . . . If **J.D. Martinez** just puts up an average year, with Cabrera and **Victor Martinez**, that's a tough lineup, man. . . . **Nick Castellanos** looks like he's a little bit bigger and stronger over last year. He'll hit 20-plus home runs eventually. Defensively, he doesn't have the big range of a really good third baseman, and he lacks overall quickness.

LEAGUE
RANK

5

MANAGER **BRAD AUSMUS**
2ND SEASON WITH TIGERS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
2B	IAN KINSLER					
R-R	.272	.322	.419	16	82	16
3B	NICK CASTELLANOS					
R-R	.264	.313	.413	13	67	3
1B	MIGUEL CABRERA					
R-R	.311	.378	.533	30	108	0
DH	VICTOR MARTINEZ					
S-R	.301	.386	.464	18	80	0
LF	YOENIS CESPEDES					
R-R	.266	.314	.459	22	89	7
RF	J.D. MARTINEZ					
R-R	.287	.333	.485	21	79	5
C	ALEX AVILA					
L-R	.225	.330	.373	10	47	0
SS	JOSE IGLESIAS					
R-R	.271	.323	.343	3	26	7
CF	ANTHONY GOSE					
L-L	.236	.307	.355	3	21	19

BENCH

OF	RAJAI DAVIS					
R-R	.262	.303	.372	6	35	30
C	JAMES MCCANN (R)					
R-R	.239	.275	.328	2	17	3

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
LH	DAVID PRICE			
	15	3.16	1.09	8.9
RH	JUSTIN VERLANDER			
	14	3.83	1.31	8.0
RH	ANIBAL SANCHEZ			
	11	3.21	1.15	8.4
RH	ALFREDO SIMON			
	9	4.62	1.36	5.6
RH	SHANE GREENE			
	11	3.93	1.35	8.1
	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	JOE NATHAN			
	34	3.54	1.23	9.4
RH	JOAKIM SORIA			
	3	3.56	1.15	9.8

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

DAVID
PRICE



Modest Proposal

Throughout the Tigers' recent run of success, their bullpen has been an ongoing weak spot. Detroit has employed brand-name closers—**Jose Valverde**, **Joe Nathan**—right as they began to put up generic stat lines. The pitchers in front of those men have been more or less adequate but, like **Joba Chamberlain** last year, not dominant. In camp this year, though, the Tigers have a pitcher who could change the late innings for manager Brad Ausmus: **Bruce Rondon**, who averaged 98 mph on his fastball two seasons ago, is back after losing 2014 to Tommy John surgery. Rondon, 24, who touched 103 mph in his rookie season, could become the Tigers' **Dellin Betances** or **Wade Davis**. Once he proves he's healthy, Rondon should be allowed to throw high-leverage innings; the Tigers have a smaller margin for error in a newly competitive AL Central, and they can't afford to fumble around with failing relievers for another season.

CHICAGO
WHITE SOX

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE WHITE SOX

I like what the White Sox did in the off-season, even though they have a question at second base and their catching isn't very good. . . . **Jose Abreu** takes what they give him, uses the whole field, and he's so big and strong he can take you out of the park anyway. It wouldn't surprise me if he hit 40 homers with a high average. . . . **Adam Eaton** is one of those guys that'd run through a fence, and he's got tools. He's a pest on the bases, he's a good centerfielder, he can throw, he's got some power. . . . I think this is going to be a great park for **Adam LaRoche**. He gets the ball in the air, he's got power, and he can spell Abreu at first. . . . I don't think **Tyler Flowers** is a regular catcher. He strikes out too much, and I don't think he catches and throws quite well enough. . . . **Chris Sale**'s stuff is premium. It moves all over from a lower-arm angle than you're used to seeing; his elbows and arms are flying. He's got to be careful not to rush back from his broken foot. . . . When **Jose Quintana** was coming up, he'd be going fine and just lose it, couldn't find the plate. But he's been strong two years in a row. . . . The bottom of the rotation is concerning. **John Danks** doesn't have the stuff he used to, and **Hector Noesi** is not a good fit in that ballpark, because he gives up a lot of fly balls. . . . To me, **David Robertson** is probably the most important new guy they got. So many games got away from them last year because of their bullpen, and I can't tell you how demoralizing that is, especially to a younger team.

2015 MLB
PREVIEW

AL

CENTRAL

LEAGUE
RANK

7

MANAGER **ROBIN VENTURA**
4TH SEASON WITH WHITE SOX

B-T BA OBP SLG HR RBI SB

CF ADAM EATON
L-L .286 .350 .387 4 44 16

LF MELKY CABRERA
S-L .302 .351 .449 13 63 7

1B JOSE ABREU
R-R .301 .378 .538 34 102 2

DH ADAM LAROCHE
L-L .262 .358 .454 25 75 2

RF AVISAIL GARCIA
R-R .278 .319 .419 15 69 6

SS ALEXEI RAMIREZ
R-R .271 .300 .388 11 61 23

3B CONOR GILLASPIE
L-R .269 .327 .403 9 50 1

C TYLER FLOWERS
R-R .230 .277 .372 14 45 0

2B MICAH JOHNSON (R)
L-R .244 .294 .346 2 13 16

BENCH

2B CARLOS SANCHEZ (R)
S-R .262 .302 .349 2 16 6

2B EMILIO BONIFACIO
S-R .245 .297 .332 3 24 27

W ERA WHIP K/9

LH CHRIS SALE
14 2.69 1.06 9.4

RH JEFF SAMARDZIJA
13 3.37 1.14 8.6

LH JOSE QUINTANA
10 3.48 1.25 7.5

LH JOHN DANKS
8 4.68 1.39 6.2

RH HECTOR NOESI
9 4.68 1.35 6.5

SV ERA WHIP K/9

RH DAVID ROBERTSON
41 2.63 1.06 12.0

RH JAKE PETRICKA
0 3.29 1.37 7.3

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

The White Sox pushed themselves into contention with an off-season shopping spree that added **Jeff Samardzija**, **Melky Cabrera**, **Adam LaRoche**, **David Robertson** and **Zach Duke**. To get over the top, they'll need one more bold move—opening the season with **Carlos Rodon** in the rotation. Rodon, the third pick in the 2014 draft, is a polished college starter and a top 15 prospect. More important, he is already better than incumbent fifth starter **Hector Noesi**. By promoting Rodon, they can put him under the care of Don Cooper, one of the game's best pitching coaches. The Sox open the season with three weeks of AL Central games, and they may not have ace **Chris Sale**, who suffered a broken right foot in February, until mid- to late April. If they're trying to win now, they have to set aside convention—and service-time considerations—and open the year with Rodon in the bigs.

JOSE
ABREU

KANSAS CITY
ROYALS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE ROYALS

They'll contend again. . . . **Yordano Ventura** and **Danny Duffy** have quality stuff—not just velocity but the secondary stuff to go with it. The key for both is to be more efficient so they can get through seven innings on 100 pitches—easier said than done for them. . . . **Edinson Volquez** should build on his bounce-back year in Pittsburgh. He's in a pitcher's park on a team that plays very good defense. . . . **Eric Hosmer** needs to stay more consistent with the quality of his at bats. He has bat speed, he has strength, he just needs focus day in, day out. . . . **Lorenzo Cain** is an impact player both offensively and defensively. He's got a chance to be an All-Star if he plays 150 games and avoids hamstring problems. . . . **Alex Gordon** needs to not worry about power and just hit. At times he tries to do more than he's capable of; he's not going to be a 30-homer guy. . . . **Kendrys Morales** and **Alex Rios** will help that lineup a lot. Late last year Morales had better pitch recognition and quality of at bats. With a full spring training, he'll be fine. . . . Rios has lost a little bat speed. The key for him is to stay in the middle of the field and not worry about homers. . . . When **Sal Perez** is rested, he's one of the best catchers in baseball, but he gets too tired. They need to trust **Eric Kratz** or another backup. . . . It will be very hard for **Greg Holland**, **Wade Davis** and **Kelvin Herrera** to repeat what they did last year, but this is the best bullpen in baseball. A weakness: They don't have a true left-on-left guy with **Tim Collins** hurt.

LEAGUE
RANK

10

MANAGER **NED YOST**
6TH SEASON WITH ROYALS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
SS	ALCIDES ESCOBAR					
R-R	.277	.310	.366	4	49	29
1B	ERIC HOSMER					
L-L	.287	.342	.427	14	68	7
RF	ALEX RIOS					
R-R	.284	.321	.421	11	65	15
DH	KENDRYS MORALES					
S-R	.254	.310	.406	15	60	0
LF	ALEX GORDON					
L-R	.278	.354	.438	14	75	8
C	SALVADOR PEREZ					
R-R	.266	.296	.420	19	75	0
3B	MIKE Moustakas					
L-R	.239	.297	.419	19	63	1
2B	OMAR INFANTE					
R-R	.276	.311	.385	8	59	9
CF	LORENZO CAIN					
R-R	.281	.327	.392	6	57	25

BENCH

SS	CHRISTIAN COLON (R)					
R-R	.265	.322	.355	3	23	7
OF	JARROD DYSON					
L-R	.265	.327	.349	2	21	38

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	YORDANO VENTURA			
	13	3.23	1.24	8.1
LH	DANNY DUFFY			
	10	2.96	1.18	7.5
RH	EDINSON VOLQUEZ			
	11	4.06	1.38	7.1
LH	JASON VARGAS			
	11	3.80	1.28	6.2
RH	JEREMY GUTHRIE			
	13	4.19	1.35	5.2

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	GREG HOLLAND			
	44	1.66	0.99	13.2
RH	WADE DAVIS			
	2	1.52	0.94	12.7

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

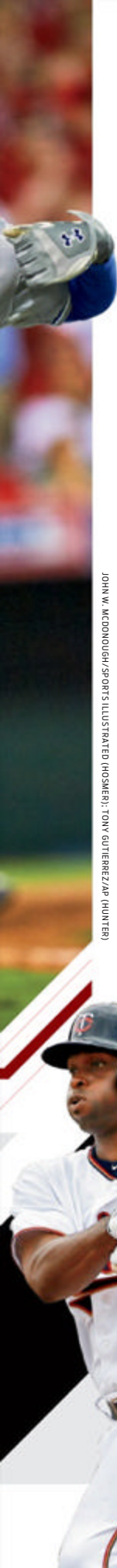
2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
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ERIC
HOSMER



Modest Proposal

The Royals signed **Chris Young** to a one-year, incentive-laden deal, and while he doesn't have a place in the rotation right now, he deserves one soon. Young is a low-velocity pitcher—he averaged 85 mph with his fastball last season, third lowest among qualifying starters—and he is as extreme a fly ball pitcher as there is in the game. He led qualifying starters last year in fly ball rate (58.7%) and in lowest ground ball-fly ball ratio (0.38), and was second to Washington's Jordan Zimmermann at inducing pop-ups. Young's skill set is akin to recent Royals imports **Jeremy Guthrie** and **Jason Vargas**, both of whom have succeeded in Kansas City. This team likes to get fly ball pitchers, put them in spacious Kauffman Stadium with jackrabbits in the outfield and let them work. Young could actually be a better fit for the Royals' rotation than the more expensive **Edinson Volquez**, and Ned Yost should be aggressive about switching the two if Volquez returns to his poor 2013 form.



JOHN W. MC DONOUGH/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (HOSMER); TONY GUTIERREZ/AP (HUNTER)

2015 MLB
PREVIEW

AL

CENTRAL

TORII
HUNTER

MINNESOTA
TWINS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE TWINS

Minnesota is better, but its results may not be, because the division has improved a lot. . . . They'll give Paul Molitor a lot of rope. The team stopped listening to Ron Gardenhire, so the manager change was smart. . . . The starting pitching is respectable now. Getting **Ervin Santana** helps. . . . **Phil Hughes** always had the stuff. Coming up, he was like a clone of Roger Clemens. He pitched with confidence last year. . . . **Joe Mauer** has lost his power, and in that ballpark it's not coming back. He's an opposite-field singles and doubles hitter now. . . . **Torii Hunter** is a role model for those kids, but he can't hit great pitching anymore, and he's not a Gold Glover anymore. . . . **Miguel Sano** will be a factor before **Byron Buxton**, their other big prospect. I think Sano will be up this year playing third base. Buxton is a tremendous talent and can really play in center, but he may not hit in the big leagues right away. . . . **Brian Dozier** is good at second, **Kurt Suzuki** is solid behind the plate, but **Trevor Plouffe** is a typical second-division third baseman. He'll hit 15 homers and play O.K. defense. . . . **Oswaldo Arcia** has power, but he's not going to hit for average, and I don't see a change in his approach. They have a good extra outfielder to cover him in **Jordan Schafer**, who can play the late innings. . . . **Aaron Hicks** doesn't look like he's going to hit in the majors. . . . **Kennys Vargas** is a monster, 6' 5" and 280 pounds, a switch-hitter with big power—when he makes contact. He has DH written all over him.

LEAGUE
RANK

15

MANAGER **PAUL MOLITOR**
1ST SEASON WITH TWINS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
SS	DANNY SANTANA					
S-R	.275	.307	.382	9	46	22
2B	BRIAN DOZIER					
R-R	.250	.343	.425	19	72	22
1B	JOE MAUER					
L-R	.300	.385	.418	7	57	3
DH	KENNYS VARGAS					
S-R	.274	.336	.452	15	67	0
RF	TORII HUNTER					
R-R	.278	.307	.421	14	71	3
LF	OSWALDO ARCIA					
L-R	.256	.320	.475	23	74	2
3B	TREVOR PLOUFFE					
R-R	.261	.329	.445	16	74	2
C	KURT SUZUKI					
R-R	.261	.314	.338	2	47	1
CF	AARON HICKS					
S-R	.229	.319	.347	6	34	9

BENCH

OF	JORDAN SCHAFER					
L-L	.235	.316	.316	2	19	27
IF	EDUARDO ESCOBAR					
S-R	.264	.305	.384	4	28	1

W ERA WHIP K/9

RH	PHIL HUGHES					
13	3.88	1.16	7.8			
RH	ERVIN SANTANA					
12	3.86	1.24	7.5			
RH	KYLE GIBSON					
13	4.29	1.29	6.3			
RH	RICKY NOLASCO					
9	4.60	1.37	6.7			
RH	MIKE PELFREY					
3	5.33	1.58	5.3			

SV ERA WHIP K/9

LH	GLEN PERKINS					
35	3.26	1.17	11.0			
RH	CASEY FIEN					
3	3.72	1.10	8.5			

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
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Modest Proposal

Last year, the Twins' hurlers combined the AL's worst strikeout rate with its worst defensive efficiency—a measure of balls in play turned into outs—which is how you lead the league in runs allowed while playing in a pitchers' park. The outfield was a significant problem, as only the Rangers, Tigers and Blue Jays allowed more doubles-plus-triples than the Twins. If you can't get strikeouts and you can't make plays, you're going to lose. Bringing in **Torii Hunter**, who at this stage of his career is a poor outfielder, only exacerbates the problem, especially with **Oswaldo Arcia** in left. The Twins have to begin emphasizing position players with range if they're going to escape the basement. It can start with **Jordan Schafer** getting playing time alongside **Aaron Hicks**, with Hunter and Arcia DH'ing or on the bench. By late this year it can mean **Byron Buxton** joining the outfield to give the Twins three legitimate defenders in the pasture.



ROBINSON
CANO

2015 MLB
PREVIEW

AL
WEST

HISASHI
IWAKUMA

SEATTLE
MARINERS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE MARINERS

This is my pick to win the division. The only weakness they really had last year was that righthanded bat, and they went out and got the best one available in **Nelson Cruz**. . . . **Kyle Seager** probably has the most rhythmic leg kick in the game right now. Never off beat, always on time, doesn't swing at a lot of bad pitches. When I first laid eyes on him, I'm like, Who's this little Weeble-bodied guy? But man, he's just strong. . . . I expect **Robinson Cano**'s power numbers to go up because you could tell that there were teams that weren't gonna let him beat them. This year they can't do that because now they have to deal with Cruz as well. . . .

Logan Morrison might be a weakness at first base, but he gives you a better at bat than Justin Smoak did. . . . **Jesus Montero** looks like he lost a person. It at least gives you the consideration that he might be able to play a little first base. . . . Their pitching is definitely going to be a strength. Seattle's bullpen can stack up with anybody's. They've got left-on-left guys, they've got power guys. . . . **Felix Hernandez** used to throw 95, 97. Now he pitches at 90 to 94. He cuts you, he sinks you, he carves you. He works fast. His ball is heavy. He is probably the best righthanded pitcher in the game. . . . **Hisashi Iwakuma** has a power sinker and gets so many ground balls. You can tell when he's pitching in Seattle just by looking in front of home plate and seeing how damp that dirt seems.

LEAGUE
RANK

1

MANAGER **LLOYD MCCLENDON**
2ND SEASON WITH MARINERS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
CF	AUSTIN JACKSON					
R-R	.267	.328	.383	7	51	15
RF	SETH SMITH					
L-L	.263	.365	.441	13	47	1
2B	ROBINSON CANO					
L-R	.314	.379	.469	17	83	6
DH	NELSON CRUZ					
R-R	.252	.304	.436	25	81	3
3B	KYLE SEAGER					
L-R	.267	.335	.441	23	90	6
1B	LOGAN MORRISON					
L-L	.250	.318	.400	11	45	3
LF	DUSTIN ACKLEY					
L-R	.244	.301	.371	10	51	7
SS	BRAD MILLER					
L-R	.252	.325	.414	11	41	5
C	MIKE ZUNINO					
R-R	.209	.261	.395	20	62	0

BENCH				
OF	JUSTIN RUGGIANO			
R-R	.259	.325	.429	11 37 8
SS	WILLIE BLOOMQUIST			
R-R	.269	.293	.323	0 14 2

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	FELIX HERNANDEZ			
	16	2.56	1.02	9.3
RH	HISASHI IWAKUMA			
	13	3.42	1.10	7.6
LH	JAMES PAXTON			
	8	3.30	1.29	7.9
LH	J.A. HAPP			
	11	4.09	1.34	7.7
RH	TAIJUAN WALKER			
	8	3.64	1.27	8.9

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	FERNANDO RODNEY			
	40	3.97	1.24	10.3
RH	DANNY FARQUHAR			
	1	2.95	1.13	10.4

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Austin Jackson has been serving as the Mariners' leadoff man in the Cactus League, which may not be the best thing for a team that hasn't had a league-average OBP since 2007. Jackson, 28, has a career .336 OBP, but just .322 the past two seasons, and he doesn't draw many walks. Like many righthanded hitters Seattle has acquired in recent years, Jackson didn't adapt well to life at Safeco, hitting just .229/.267/.260 after being traded to Seattle last July. The Mariners would be better off sliding Jackson down to sixth and letting newly acquired 32-year-old outfielder **Seth Smith** (.347 career OBP, .367 in 2014) lead off. They can then bat their best hitter, **Robinson Cano**, second, with **Nelson Cruz** and **Kyle Seager** following. Giving Seattle's best hitters the most plate appearances is the first step toward building a good offense.

LOS ANGELES
ANGELS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE ANGELS

The question is whether this club is gonna be the offensive juggernaut it's been in the past. . . . **Albert Pujols** is moving with no restriction. He's 35, so expect some drop-off, but if he can stay healthy, he'll probably give you a big year. I'd give him some rest and play **C.J. Cron** at first base. . . . Everybody has ordained **Mike Trout** as the best player in baseball, and rightfully so. There are no weaknesses to his game. You want your baddest guy hitting third, and no disrespect to Pujols, but that is definitely Trout. . . . **Collin Cowgill** is a base stealer, a line drive hitter. Players with his skill set, if you run them out there every day, that's when they get exposed. . . . Last year **David Freese**'s back side was collapsing a little bit. He had an uppercut. If he goes back to driving the ball gap to gap, he'll be solid. . . . **Jered Weaver**'s delivery is so deceptive and he can make the ball move both ways. He came into camp 20 pounds heavier to be a little more durable. . . . **Garrett Richards** throws downhill, at a tough angle for righthanded hitters, and throws 97 on top of that—he is nasty. . . . Last year it looked like **C.J. Wilson** was scared of the middle of the plate. There was nothing wrong with his velocity or anything. I think it's just in between the ears. . . . I expect **Cam Bedrosian** to be a setup guy and possible closer down the line. He has a heavy ball with late life through the zone. . . . Not having a lefthanded go-to guy in the bullpen concerns me in the AL West, where you'll have to get out a Robinson Cano or a Prince Fielder.

LEAGUE
RANK

2

MANAGER **MIKE SCIOSCIA**
16TH SEASON WITH ANGELS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
RF	KOLE CALHOUN					
L-L	.280	.343	.469	19	72	8
CF	MIKE TROUT					
R-R	.305	.396	.560	32	102	24
1B	ALBERT PUJOLS					
R-R	.270	.324	.464	27	100	4
LF	MATT JOYCE					
L-R	.246	.338	.415	15	60	1
3B	DAVID FREESE					
R-R	.267	.336	.397	11	61	2
DH	C.J. CRON					
R-R	.263	.299	.416	16	70	2
SS	ERICK AYBAR					
S-R	.278	.315	.388	7	59	15
2B	JOSH RUTLEDGE					
R-R	.257	.307	.378	5	29	6
C	CHRIS IANNETTA					
R-R	.240	.362	.388	11	47	1

BENCH

OF	COLLIN COWGILL					
R-L	.242	.311	.348	4	17	3
2B	GRANT GREEN					
R-R	.266	.298	.375	3	21	2

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	JERED WEAVER			
13	3.71	1.24	6.3	
RH	GARRETT RICHARDS			
10	3.24	1.19	8.4	
LH	C.J. WILSON			
12	3.98	1.40	7.9	
RH	MATT SHOEMAKER			
15	3.72	1.16	7.5	
LH	ANDREW HEANEY (R)			
7	3.57	1.19	8.3	

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	HUSTON STREET			
36	1.96	0.96	8.5	
RH	JOE SMITH			
3	2.19	0.97	7.8	

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

MIKE
TROUT



Modest Proposal

By trading second baseman Howie Kendrick for **Andrew Heaney**—an understandable attempt to free up payroll room and bolster the back end of a shallow rotation—the Angels opened a big hole in their lineup. The team traded for **Josh Rutledge** from the Rockies, nominally to take over at second, but also has holdover **Grant Green** and prospect **Taylor Featherston** in the mix. The most interesting option, though, is former Royals prospect **Johnny Giavotella**. Giavotella was a bit mistake-prone in Kansas City, and he never did hit the way he was supposed to (.277 OBP in parts of four seasons). He has, however, a career .384 OBP in 413 Triple A games, with doubles power. Rutledge, the front-runner, has a career .308 OBP—but just .274 outside of Coors Field. With Giavotella and catcher **Chris Iannetta**, the Angels would have a high-OBP bottom of the lineup, putting more runners on base for **Kole Calhoun** at leadoff and, most important, **Mike Trout** in the number 2 slot.



JOHN W. McDONOUGH/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (TROUT); CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES (ZOBORIST)

2015 MLB
PREVIEW

AL
WEST

BEN
ZOBORIST

OAKLAND
ATHLETICS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE ATHLETICS

I've been learning names all spring. It's a total overhaul over there. . . . **Sonny Gray** and **Scott Kazmir** are probably the only sure things in the rotation. Gray fits every criteria of a No. 1, and he's only gonna get better. When Jeff Samardzija and Jon Lester were over there, he was like a little puppy, sucking every bit of information from them that he could. . . . There are people saying **Barry Zito's** stuff reminds them of when he first got there. I'm not in that group because once you lose velo, I don't care. . . . **Fernando Abad** is underrated. Not only is he capable of coming in to face a tough lefthanded hitter, throwing up to 97 with a plus slider, but he also gets out righties and is capable of pitching multiple innings. . . . **Josh Reddick** is not looking to take pitches. He goes up there to do damage. This is a team that has a reputation for working pitchers over, trying to get into the bullpen. But trying to get him to buy into that would probably be counterproductive. . . . **Ike Davis** has got enough power to hit the ball to any part of the ballpark, if he ever commits to not just being a big pull guy. But I'm not seeing that. . . . The other day I said, "I can see one thing about **Billy Butler**: He didn't spend much time at 24 Hour Fitness during the off-season." Lo and behold, two minutes later he comes up and shoots the ball out of the yard. . . . When Billy Beane used to make all these moves, you would say, It's gonna be a long year for this club. But it doesn't look that way.

Modest Proposal

Scott Kazmir was one of the better stories of the first half of 2014, building on his '13 comeback by making the All-Star team with a 2.38 first-half ERA, a 23% strikeout rate and a fantastic 108/27 K/BB. Carrying his highest workload since '07 seemed to wear on him, though, as his strikeout rate dropped by a fourth and his ERA more than doubled, to 5.42, over his final 13 starts. Even at his peak, Kazmir was never a high-durability hurler, with one 200-inning season and less than six innings per start from '05 through '09. His history and his poor second half should be warning signs for the A's. Oakland has a lot of ready depth in starters and is bringing back two key members of the '13 rotation, **Jarrod Parker** and **A.J. Griffin**, who missed last year to Tommy John surgery; the team should be quick to pull Kazmir if he starts this season the same way he ended the last one.

LEAGUE
RANK

9

MANAGER **BOB MELVIN**
5TH SEASON WITH A'S

	B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
LF	COCO CRISP						
S-R	.253	.333	.404	14	53	23	
2B	BEN ZOBORIST						
S-R	.275	.360	.402	11	60	9	
1B	BILLY BUTLER						
R-R	.285	.350	.412	14	78	0	
DH	IKE DAVIS						
L-L	.223	.331	.387	14	52	1	
RF	JOSH REDDICK						
L-R	.248	.312	.427	15	60	5	
3B	BRETT LAWRIE						
R-R	.257	.310	.388	14	63	6	
C	STEPHEN VOGT						
L-R	.268	.313	.397	8	34	0	
SS	MARCUS SEMIEN						
R-R	.257	.333	.424	12	54	12	
CF	SAM FULD						
L-L	.231	.311	.351	3	25	14	

BENCH

2B	ERIC SOGARD						
R-R	.239	.302	.309	1	24	9	
1B	MARK CANHA (R)						
R-R	.231	.306	.361	5	28	1	

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	SONNY GRAY			
13	2.94	1.18	8.2	
LH	SCOTT KAZMIR			
10	4.06	1.27	7.9	
RH	JESSE HAHN			
8	3.45	1.19	8.6	
LH	DREW POMERANZ			
9	3.46	1.30	8.6	
RH	JESSE CHAVEZ			
6	3.77	1.29	8.5	

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
LH	SEAN DOOLITTLE			
28	2.77	0.81	10.4	
RH	TYLER CLIPPARD			
12	2.66	1.06	9.3	

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM



Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE RANGERS

It was such a tragedy for **Yu Darvish** to go down. . . . **Yovani Gallardo** is not the No. 1-type starter he was in Milwaukee. He's lost a little velocity, but he's going to be more than serviceable. . . . I don't think this staff is set right now. You're looking at a bunch of no-name guys possibly getting opportunities. They signed **Joe Beimel**—what does that tell you? . . . **Neftali Feliz** is still not free and easy like he was. He had 40 saves, they tried to make him a starter, and he hasn't been the same since. It appears he's somewhat slinging the ball and not finishing out front, like he's still a little apprehensive. . . . They have the chance to have the most productive infield in baseball. There's nothing **Adrian Beltre** can't do, nothing that he hasn't done as a third baseman. . . . **Rougned Odor** is legit. A little big man. It wouldn't surprise me if he hit 25 home runs this year. . . . **Prince Fielder** is in tremendous shape. I saw him beat out a ball against the shift for an infield hit. Timing is not there yet—fastballs I've seen him punish in the past, he's just a little off now. But he's healthy. . . . I wouldn't write in stone that it's going to be either **Ryan Rua** or **Jake Smolinski** in leftfield all season because **Michael Choice** could have something to say about it. He's always been a big, strong lower-body kid. They squared him up. He's got tremendous bat speed and power. . . . For them to even be considered contenders, everything's basically going to have to go perfect—and it's already started out bad.

LEAGUE
RANK

13

MANAGER **JEFF BANISTER**
1ST SEASON WITH RANGERS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
CF	LEONYS MARTIN					
L-R	.278	.333	.419	12	48	36
RF	SHIN-SOO CHOO					
L-L	.265	.378	.427	18	54	13
3B	ADRIAN BELTRE					
R-R	.315	.386	.486	20	81	0
1B	PRINCE FIELDER					
L-L	.281	.373	.454	22	92	1
DH	MITCH MORELAND					
L-L	.243	.304	.420	13	48	0
LF	RYAN RUA (R)					
R-R	.252	.310	.413	7	28	3
2B	ROUGNED ODOR					
L-R	.274	.322	.443	13	66	15
C	ROBINSON CHIRINOS					
R-R	.245	.297	.406	13	45	0
SS	ELVIS ANDRUS					
R-R	.273	.329	.357	3	53	31

BENCH

OF	JAKE SMOLINSKI					
R-R	.249	.318	.355	5	20	3
C	CARLOS CORPORAN					
S-R	.235	.291	.377	6	18	0

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
LH	DEREK HOLLAND			
10	3.44	1.24	7.6	
RH	YOVANI GALLARDO			
11	3.74	1.32	7.3	
LH	ROSS DETWILER			
2	4.45	1.50	4.9	
RH	COLBY LEWIS			
9	4.65	1.36	7.4	
RH	NICK TEPESECH			
6	4.31	1.34	5.5	

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	NEFTALI FELIZ			
35	3.00	1.11	7.6	
RH	TANNER SCHEPPERS			
1	2.66	1.25	7.7	

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

PRINCE
FIELDER



Modest Proposal

The expansion of bullpens to include seven and sometimes eight men is one of the most odious trends in 21st-century baseball, necessitated by the decline of first the long reliever and later the high-leverage two-inning reliever. The Rangers, however, may have no choice but to start the year with eight men in the bullpen. With **Yu Darvish** out for the year and **Derek Holland** working through shoulder soreness, the team's Opening Day rotation is composed of mid-rotation, six-inning starters. To fit eight men into the bullpen, the Rangers should eschew a traditional backup infielder. **Adrian Beltre**, **Elvis Andrus** and **Rougned Odor** are all everyday players, and outfielder **Ryan Rua** has extensive minor league experience at second and third base, some at first and a little at shortstop. It's a suboptimal solution, but it may be the best way for new manager Jeff Banister to ensure that he has the arms to cover nine innings, or more, a day until Holland returns.



2015 MLB PREVIEW

AL
WEST

GEORGE SPRINGER

HOUSTON
ASTROS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE ASTROS

I think it's a better team this year, but it's not a wild-card team yet. . . . **Jon Singleton**, if he doesn't try to do too much, he'll be fine. He gets too big with his swing, but it's nice and fluid, with loose extension. . . . They say **Evan Gattis** is going to catch two or three times a month, which I find odd. I'd hate to be the pitcher throwing to the guy that only catches three times a month. He has a hard time laying off a ball up. Two inches away from his strength is his weakness. . . . **Jose Altuve**'s the toughest out in baseball. Short and compact to the ball, and he sprays line drives all over the place. . . . They want **Jake Marisnick** to be the everyday centerfielder. He's got a ways to go with the bat—he still gets tied up a bit with the fastballs in and the breaking ball—but he's got a chance to win a Gold Glove. . . . **George Springer**'s got power to all fields. He's a big swinger. When he first came up, he'd go down on one knee swinging. He expands the zone, struggles to recognize spin. . . . **Chris Carter**'s got monster power. His pitch recognition isn't great, but he's a good mistake hitter. . . . It's a contact-oriented rotation. You want some swing-and-miss there, and it's not that. . . . **Dallas Keuchel** puts the ball on the ground and he's got a great changeup. It has a lot of deception. . . . **Scott Feldman**'s fastball's a little light—88 to 91—so he throws a lot of cut fastballs. He wants you to mis-hit the ball. He's not gonna strike you out. . . . Their No. 5 is, whoo, pray for rain or some off-days.

LEAGUE
RANK

14

MANAGER **A.J. HINCH**
1ST SEASON WITH ASTROS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
2B	JOSE ALTUVE					
R-R	.317	.355	.424	6	51	50
SS	JED LOWRIE					
S-R	.265	.330	.403	11	57	0
RF	GEORGE SPRINGER					
R-R	.246	.335	.480	32	82	15
DH	CHRIS CARTER					
R-R	.235	.323	.483	35	89	3
LF	EVAN GATTIS					
R-R	.251	.305	.471	28	75	0
CF	COLBY RASMUS					
L-L	.243	.304	.453	20	61	2
3B	LUIS VALBUENA					
L-R	.275	.381	.482	13	43	1
C	JASON CASTRO					
L-R	.255	.327	.426	14	52	1
1B	JONATHAN SINGLETON					
L-L	.214	.333	.406	22	71	3

BENCH

C HANK CONGER	S-R	.228	.295	.360	7	28	0
3B MATT DOMINGUEZ	R-R	.238	.282	.390	19	62	0

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
LH DALLAS KEUCHEL	10	3.84	1.32	6.9
RH SCOTT FELDMAN	9	3.95	1.28	6.0
RH COLLIN MCHUGH	12	3.49	1.12	8.4
LH BRETT OBERHOLTZER	7	4.12	1.32	6.5
RH DAN STRALLY	6	4.17	1.27	8.0

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH CHAD QUALLS	21	3.44	1.24	6.9
RH LUKE GREGGERSON	15	2.96	1.13	8.4

NEW ACQUISITION (R) ROOKIE

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Two signs that the Astros are shifting their focus from building to winning were the off-season signings of **Luke Gregerson** and **Pat Neshek** to three- and two-year contracts, respectively. Houston had treated its bullpen as an afterthought the past few seasons; now it's giving new manager A.J. Hinch some reliable arms for the late innings. Neshek, in particular, is interesting: In 2014 with the Cardinals, he got back to being the extreme strike thrower he'd been when he came up with the Twins in '06, walking just seven men unintentionally in 67⅓ innings—a 2.7% walk rate. Because he was so efficient, he averaged just 3.9 pitches per batter faced. Despite this, Mike Matheny used him for more than one inning just seven times. Hinch should look to get more from Neshek, who gets lefties out (.226 career BA allowed) and could become an effective multi-inning weapon if given the chance.



MAX
SCHERZER

2015 MLB PREVIEW

NL

EAST

ANTHONY
RENDON

WASHINGTON
NATIONALS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE NATIONALS

The one thing that scares me about this team? **Drew Storen** could be a problem at closer. I wonder how he's going to bounce back from his blown save in Game 2 of the NLDS. . . . Even so, run, don't walk to Vegas and put some money on this team. The rotation is just ridiculous—it reminds me of that Orioles rotation with the four 20-game winners. Hell, I wouldn't be surprised if their top four starters finished 1-2-3-4 in Cy Young voting. **Gio Gonzalez** is the No. 5 starter, and he may have the best curveball in the game. . . . **Stephen Strasburg's** key is going to be realizing that he can pitch 93 and once in a while get to 97, but only when he needs to. . . . **Ryan Zimmerman's** position change will help him considerably. He was making errors over at third because he would peek and see where the runner was, and he was a mess. His mind will be clear at first base, and it'll help him at the plate. . . . **Anthony Rendon** has hit the ground running—the game has never sped up for him. He doesn't have their power, but he reminds me of Manny Ramirez and Miguel Cabrera with his approach at the plate, how he never panics and is just so gifted. . . . People have **Bryce Harper** all wrong: It's not all ego with him, he's a great student of the game. He seems stronger physically, more flexible. He's driven to be great, and on the big stage in the playoffs last year, when no one else was hitting, he had unbelievably good at bats and some home runs that still haven't landed. It'll carry into this year.

Modest Proposal

The Nationals have put together the best team in baseball, with a roster that has star talent up front and depth in back. They can score runs and prevent them. Their one weakness may be in the outfield, where their reserve flycatchers are veteran **Nate McLouth** and rookie **Michael Taylor**. Washington needs a better fourth outfielder, given that **Bryce Harper** has yet to show durability, that **Jayson Werth** turns 36 in May, and that **Denard Span** will be unavailable to start the season following surgery on an abdominal muscle. Fortunately there are a number of teams that need to move outfielders just to manage roster crunches. The Nationals could trade for Shane Victorino from the Red Sox or Cameron Maybin from the Padres, for instance, and a willingness to take on a contract could mean not having to pay much in talent. Adding a fourth outfielder who can play center and hit would patch one of the only holes on this impressive team.

LEAGUE
RANK

1

MANAGER **MATT WILLIAMS**
2ND SEASON WITH NATIONALS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
CF	DENARD SPAN					
L-L	.286	.343	.393	5	35	22
3B	ANTHONY RENDON					
R-R	.279	.348	.454	19	77	15
LF	JAYSON WERTH					
R-R	.300	.394	.475	16	72	7
RF	BRUCE HARPER					
L-R	.286	.364	.511	29	73	10
1B	RYAN ZIMMERMAN					
R-R	.279	.346	.463	20	82	4
SS	IAN DESMOND					
R-R	.276	.333	.467	25	81	20
C	WILSON RAMOS					
R-R	.270	.311	.443	18	67	0
2B	YUNEL ESCOBAR					
R-R	.255	.308	.348	8	43	2

BENCH

2B	DANNY ESPINOSA					
S-R	.217	.276	.355	8	27	8
C	JOSE LOBATON					
S-R	.248	.316	.374	6	30	0
OF	MICHAEL TAYLOR (R)					
L-R	.265	.317	.431	8	44	13

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	MAX SCHERZER			
18	3.08	1.09	10.6	
RH	STEPHEN STRASBURG			
15	3.09	1.10	10.1	
RH	JORDAN ZIMMERMANN			
15	2.93	1.10	7.9	
RH	DOUG FISTER			
13	2.75	1.12	6.0	
LH	GIO GONZALEZ			
11	3.49	1.23	8.8	

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	DREW STOREN			
40	2.59	1.12	7.8	
RH	CASEY JANSSEN			
2	3.53	1.14	7.4	

NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM



Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE MARLINS

If they can hang in until **Jose Fernandez** comes back, I absolutely think they can give Washington a run. . . . **Henderson Alvarez**, wow. He pitches off a low- to mid-90s fastball, pounds the strike zone and mixes in everything else for strikes. If he has a bad inning, it's usually only one bad inning. . . . At times **Jarred Cosart** has a dominant mid-90s fastball, and at times a plus breaking ball. . . . **Giancarlo Stanton** doesn't look affected at all [after getting hit in the face last September]. Last year he made the most improvement of any hitter I've seen in a long time. Recognizing pitches, learning to use the opposite field, letting his strength take over. Now he's just trying to make hard contact, and whatever happens, happens. . . . **Christian Yelich** has a chance to win a batting title. Very good knowledge of the strike zone, great hand-eye coordination. . . . **Jarrod Saltalamacchia** needs to have a better year defensively. His bat's going to play, but he should worry about handling that young staff. . . . Last year **Dee Gordon** had a great first half, and then it fell apart. He has to get back to the little things that make him good. His speed is a nice dynamic at the top of the order. . . . The metrics say **Adeiny Hechavarria** is not so good defensively, but with the human eye, he is. . . . I think **Ichiro Suzuki** has something left. He still brings energy. The addition of veteran guys like him, **Michael Morse**, **Martin Prado**, **Dan Haren**, that's what takes these young clubs to the next level.

LEAGUE
RANK

5

MANAGER **MIKE REDMOND**
3RD SEASON WITH THE MARLINS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
2B	DEE GORDON					
L-R	.289	.330	.381	1	28	54
LF	CHRISTIAN YELICH					
L-R	.289	.370	.426	12	61	22
RF	GIANCARLO STANTON					
R-R	.277	.387	.550	38	102	9
CF	MARCELL OZUNA					
R-R	.261	.316	.477	25	91	6
C	JARROD SALTALAMACCHIA					
S-R	.241	.320	.413	14	56	1
1B	MICHAEL MORSE					
R-R	.269	.319	.461	20	60	0
3B	MARTIN PRADO					
R-R	.278	.324	.421	13	68	5
SS	ADEINY HECHAVARRIA					
R-R	.263	.302	.347	3	44	9

BENCH

IF	JEFF BAKER					
R-R	.262	.314	.433	6	25	2
C	JEFF MATHIS					
R-R	.205	.277	.297	3	22	0
2B	DONOVAN SOLANO					
R-R	.268	.316	.332	2	25	4

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	MAT LATOS			
	13	3.29	1.18	7.5
RH	HENDERSON ALVAREZ			
	11	3.28	1.26	5.0
RH	JARRED COSART			
	11	3.31	1.28	6.3
RH	DAN HAREN			
	12	4.07	1.22	7.4
RH	TOM KOEHLER			
	9	4.03	1.34	7.0

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	STEVE CISHEK			
	41	2.82	1.18	10.5
RH	A.J. RAMOS			
	0	2.75	1.24	10.3

NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM



GIANCARLO
STANTON

Modest Proposal

The Marlins acquired **Dee Gordon** to be their leadoff hitter, enamored of his speed—64 steals last year—and believing his .289 batting average and .326 OBP in 2014 represent his new normal. Be skeptical; Gordon had a career .301 OBP before 2014, and his big year amounted to a white-hot start through April (.344/.375/.478) followed by five months during which he showed little change in his skills (.279/.318/.360). He walked an impossible four times in 258 plate appearances after the All-Star break. He's still best suited to bat eighth, so Miami should slide him down and use **Martin Prado** in the leadoff spot. Prado in an off-year had nearly as high an OBP, .321, as Gordon did in his best year. The move would also prevent two lefties, Gordon and **Christian Yelich**, from batting back-to-back. A Prado-Yelich-Giancarlo Stanton top of the order is the best way for the Marlins to lift an offense that was seventh in the NL in runs last year.



DAVID E. KLUTHO/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (STANTON); ROB FOLDY/GETTY IMAGES (HARVEY)

2015 MLB
PREVIEW

NL

EAST

MATT
HARVEY

NEW YORK
METS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE METS

They keep moving the fences in for **David Wright**, and they'll keep doing it until he can actually hit some home runs. But with the pitching they have, I'd move the fences back as far as possible and just outpitch and outdefense teams. . . . **Matt Harvey** looks like he hasn't skipped a beat. There's going to be some normal recovery from Tommy John. I expect him to struggle a little with the feel for his secondary pitches. Next year is probably the year he becomes a Cy Young candidate—but he could still dominate this year. . . . **Jacob deGrom** is so athletic and his delivery works so well. . . . They have kids who could contribute down the stretch, like **Noah Syndergaard**, **Steven Matz**, **Rafael Montero**. They can also be pieces to trade this summer if the team is in it. . . . It's not a bad offense. If there's a guy who's going to take the next step, it's **Travis d'Arnaud**. Last year he kind of strutted around, like he was saying, I'm a New York star of the future, I'm the s---. He got humbled—he went down and made some adjustments, using the field more. . . . Last year **Lucas Duda** emerged as a legitimate bat in the middle of the lineup. And new hitting coach Kevin Long should be a good influence on **Curtis Granderson**. . . . **Daniel Murphy** could win a batting title someday (though he isn't winning a Gold Glove ever), and **Michael Cuddyer** is overpaid but a good fit in the ballpark—he knows how to use the big part of the field. . . . It comes down to the health of Harvey and Wright. If they play a full season? This team can sneak into a wild card.

LEAGUE
RANK

9

MANAGER **TERRY COLLINS**
5TH SEASON WITH METS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
LF	CURTIS GRANDERSON					
L-R	.230	.331	.398	21	68	6
2B	DANIEL MURPHY					
L-R	.289	.328	.409	10	65	16
3B	DAVID WRIGHT					
R-R	.287	.355	.437	15	72	13
1B	LUCAS DUDA					
L-R	.244	.346	.452	27	80	2
RF	MICHAEL CUDDYER					
R-R	.286	.337	.454	17	68	5
C	TRAVIS D'ARNAUD					
R-R	.249	.309	.416	15	58	0
CF	JUAN LAGARES					
R-R	.269	.310	.375	5	51	14
SS	WILMER FLORES					
R-R	.253	.292	.392	10	43	2

BENCH

2B	DILSON HERRERA (R)					
R-R	.283	.333	.439	5	27	5
OF	JOHN MAYBERRY JR.					
R-R	.227	.298	.390	8	32	1
OF	KIRK NIEUWENHUIS					
L-R	.237	.327	.415	4	17	3

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	MATT HARVEY			
	10	3.26	1.17	8.6
RH	JACOB DEGROM			
	11	3.14	1.23	8.2
LH	JON NIESE			
	9	3.49	1.30	6.8
RH	BARTOLO COLON			
	13	3.88	1.22	6.2
RH	DILLON GEE			
	8	3.88	1.26	6.5

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	JENRRY MEJIA			
	22	3.57	1.43	8.7
RH	BOBBY PARNELL			
	2	3.35	1.47	7.4

NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Matt Harvey's return to the mound, almost 17 months after Tommy John surgery, was one of the best moments of the Mets' spring. For all the excitement about the Dark Knight of Gotham's comeback, however, New York should be cautious. The Mets are a distinct long shot to win the NL East this year, at best just another team in the deep NL wild-card mix. Their window really opens in 2016, and having Harvey put up a No. 1 starter performance with a No. 1 starter workload will be a big part of any championship plans. For 2015, they can ease off him a bit, shoot for something short of a full season—say around 27 starts—with an eye toward turning him loose the following year. There's no reason to push the 26-year-old ace, who has never thrown even 180 innings in a season, when the Mets are projected to be around .500. Save those bullets for boosting the team from 86 to 88 wins later, rather than from 81 to 83 now.

ATLANTA
BRAVES

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE BRAVES

They could lose 100 games. . . . **Christian Bethancourt** has had some struggles with the ball away, the breaking ball, but he's a dangerous mistake bat right now. . . . **Freddie Freeman** has bat speed and lift in his swing. He's clearly their biggest power threat. . . . **Alberto Callaspo** isn't a starting second baseman on a first-division club. He's probably more of a utility guy. Everything's kind of fringy. . . . **Melvin Upton**'s got a double bat-wrap swing, and he just can't catch up. He flexes his bat twice. He's the type of guy who can get a hitting coach fired. It's really hard to watch sometimes. . . . The kid I like is **Jace Peterson**. The fielding is average, but the bat—he stays in the middle of the field, sees pitches. He'll be starting at some point this year. . . . **Julio Teheran**'s pitchability got better last year as far as not overthrowing and being able to throw his off-speed pitches for strikes. . . . **Shelby Miller**'s got a big arm, fastball, slider, but his direction to the plate is a little bit across his body, and he has a tendency to get flat with his fastball. . . . **Alex Wood** has a very unconventional delivery. He moves the ball around, he's throwing strikes, funky, deceptive. You think, There's no way this can work, and then next thing you know, he's painting the corners. . . . **Craig Kimbrel** is just about automatic. Power fastball, power slider. He pitches up in the strike zone a little bit, but guys can't cheat on him because he's throwing so hard. He might not get many save opportunities.

FREDDIE
FREEMAN



LEAGUE
RANK

12

MANAGER **FREDI GONZALEZ**
5TH SEASON WITH BRAVES

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
RF	NICK MARKAKIS					
L-L	.272	.333	.363	9	45	3
3B	CHRIS JOHNSON					
R-R	.283	.315	.408	12	64	5
1B	FREDDIE FREEMAN					
L-R	.308	.394	.496	21	79	2
CF	MELVIN UPTON JR.					
R-R	.211	.289	.350	12	35	15
LF	JONNY GOMES					
R-R	.244	.340	.387	10	44	1
2B	ALBERTO CALLASPO					
S-R	.240	.313	.338	8	48	0
SS	ANDRELTON SIMMONS					
R-R	.266	.315	.388	10	49	6
C	CHRISTIAN BETHANCOURT (R)					
R-R	.250	.274	.317	4	39	2

BENCH

OF	ZOILLO ALMONTE					
S-R	.258	.302	.398	7	34	3
2B	PHIL GOSSELIN					
R-R	.272	.322	.348	2	21	5
C	A.J. PIERZYNSKI					
L-R	.264	.290	.408	13	54	0

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	JULIO TEHERAN			
	15	3.06	1.15	8.1
LH	ALEX WOOD			
	10	2.95	1.16	8.9
RH	SHELBY MILLER			
	12	3.54	1.23	8.0
LH	MIKE MINOR			
	10	4.02	1.25	7.6
LH	ERIC STULTS			
	8	4.03	1.33	5.7
	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	CRAIG KIMBREL			
	45	1.41	0.89	13.2
RH	JASON GRILLI			
	2	3.33	1.24	10.2

NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Jace Peterson was the third prospect in the package the Braves received from the Padres for Justin Upton. A supplemental first-round pick in 2011, Peterson showed good contact skills and strike-zone judgment moving through the Padres' system, with a 13% strikeout rate and 233/217 K/BB in four minor league seasons. Though Peterson was a shortstop for most of his career, the Padres moved him across the diamond last year, and he now projects as a second baseman in the majors—perhaps as soon as this season. The Braves are going to be among the worst OBP teams in the league, with glove men at catcher and shortstop and offensive black holes in leftfield and centerfield. Playing Peterson at second base could help address that problem, and as compared with veteran **Alberto Callaspo**—who is more of a third baseman at this point—there would be little to no defensive cost.

2015 MLB
PREVIEW

NL

EAST

COLE
HAMELSPHILADELPHIA
PHILLIES

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE PHILLIES

People stopped going to the ballpark in Philly last year, but if they thought last year was ugly, they're in for something this year. It's an absolute mess. The front office is in denial. There are no quick fixes here, because they've traded away a lot of their prospects—and they actually had some good prospects. . . . If I'm the GM, I trade **Cole Hamels** and **Jonathan Papelbon** and say, It's going to be a tough year, we're going for the No. 1 pick, and start building from the ground up. You have to feel for Hamels; he's never been better. And remember, he's doing it in a hitter's park—he should have great trade value. . . . Papelbon is a competitive pr---; he speaks his mind and never should, but you have to give it to him that he's reinvented himself. You started seeing him mixing curveballs and changing the way he pitched, and he's improved his command and really is a top reliever. If only you could shut him up. . . . Charlie Manuel had it good; Charlie sat back and waited for someone to hit a home run and someone usually did. Ryne Sandberg is going to try to make things happen with hit-and-run and create offense, but he's going to have to be a magician. . . . **Grady Sizemore** is a great story for how hard he worked to get back, but he's a fourth outfielder at best, and he's going to play every day for them. . . . I will say **Ryan Howard** has looked pretty good—he's lost weight, staying on the ball and using the big part of the field, like he did in his MVP year.

LEAGUE
RANK

15

MANAGER **RYNE SANDBERG**
3RD SEASON WITH PHILLIES

B-T BA OBP SLG HR RBI SB

CF **BEN REVERE**
L-R .304 .328 .353 1 30 46**LF** **GRADY SIZEMORE**
L-L .243 .307 .417 10 42 8**2B** **CHASE UTLEY**
L-R .272 .346 .431 13 70 9**1B** **RYAN HOWARD**
L-L .232 .308 .402 21 85 0**RF** **DOMONIC BROWN**
L-L .249 .303 .409 15 63 6**C** **CARLOS RUIZ**
R-R .255 .341 .351 5 30 1**3B** **CODY ASCHE**
L-R .215 .277 .363 12 50 2**SS** **FREDDY GALVIS**
S-R .219 .251 .326 3 18 1

BENCH

IF **CESAR HERNANDEZ**
S-R .232 .278 .280 0 8 1**C** **CAMERON RUPP**
R-R .222 .263 .354 4 18 0**UT** **ODUBEL HERRERA (R)**
L-R .244 .291 .306 1 15 7

W ERA WHIP K/9

LH **COLE HAMELS**
14 2.94 1.12 8.6**LH** **CLIFF LEE**
3 3.43 1.18 7.7**RH** **AARON HARANG**
9 4.10 1.38 7.0**RH** **JEROME WILLIAMS**
7 4.66 1.37 6.1**RH** **DAVID BUCHANAN**
9 3.92 1.33 5.6

SV ERA WHIP K/9

RH **JONATHAN PAPELBON**
35 2.67 1.03 9.3**RH** **KEN GILES**
5 2.35 1.08 12.0NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

The declines of the Phillies and **Grady Sizemore** have neatly paralleled each other. Sizemore peaked in 2008, making his third straight All-Star team, winning his second Gold Glove and first Silver Slugger, and posting his best finish in the MVP voting. The Phillies won the World Series. Now Philadelphia is one of the worst teams in baseball, and Sizemore is a 32-year-old with 15 homers in the last five years. The rebuilding Phillies have nothing to gain by investing playing time in Sizemore when they have young players like **Darin Ruf**, **Maikel Franco** and Rule 5 pick **Odubel Herrera** who need the at bats for development and evaluation. Even if Sizemore plays well, the Phillies aren't good enough for it to matter. Finally, Sizemore can leave as a free agent after the 2015 season, minimizing his trade value. Every at bat he takes from a player who might still be in Philly three years from now is essentially wasted.

JASON
HEYWARD



2015 MLB PREVIEW

NL

CENTRAL

CARLOS
MARTINEZ

ST. LOUIS
CARDINALS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE CARDINALS

If the staff stays healthy, they'll be back on top again. **Adam Wainwright** is gonna be fine once he gets over his abdominal strain. He knows how to take care of his body, when to push himself, when not to. . . . **Lance Lynn** is a bulldog. The way he attacks the strike zone and lets his defense work for him is one of his biggest pluses. . . . **Michael Wacha**'s arm is healthy. He's got the potential to be an All-Star—I don't think a *perennial* All-Star but a solid middle-of-the-rotation guy, as long as he continues to develop that third pitch and command of the fastball. . . . **Jason Heyward** will add a lot to that team. A plus defender, he probably hits in the 2 hole with **Matt Holliday** in the 3 hole, so he'll get Holliday a lot more pitches to hit. They do become a little lefthand-heavy, especially when **Jon Jay** is in the lineup. . . . **Matt Adams** is still on that learning curve. At times he gets overly aggressive and puts himself in bad counts. But the power is there. . . . **Yadier Molina** looks very fit; he's lost some weight. . . . I'd expect **Jhonny Peralta** to put up the same type of numbers as last year. But he can be pitched to—you can tie him up inside, and he's very aggressive early in the counts. . . . **Kolten Wong** needs to understand the zone a little more, but he's got pop and speed; he'll have a big breakout season. . . . It's not a very sexy bullpen, but it's workmanlike. It helps that they have the strong rotation; you can give the guys a blow when they need it.

LEAGUE
RANK

3

MANAGER MIKE MATHENY
4TH SEASON WITH CARDINALS

B-T BA OBP SLG HR RBI SB

3B MATT CARPENTER
L-R .291 .381 .424 9 63 4

RF JASON HEYWARD
L-L .278 .361 .443 18 66 15

LF MATT HOLLIDAY
R-R .277 .370 .455 21 91 3

1B MATT ADAMS
L-R .290 .328 .481 20 74 2

C YADIER MOLINA
R-R .301 .349 .440 11 58 3

SS JHONNY PERALTA
R-R .257 .329 .428 17 65 2

2B KOLTEN WONG
L-R .260 .311 .404 16 55 20

CF JON JAY
L-L .292 .364 .382 5 52 10

BENCH

OF PETER BOURJOS
R-R .252 .313 .349 3 19 7

C TONY CRUZ
R-R .215 .259 .308 2 19 0

OF RANDAL GRICHUK (R)
R-R .267 .316 .433 10 38 5

W ERA WHIP K/9

RH ADAM WAINWRIGHT
17 3.10 1.15 7.7

RH LANCE LYNN
16 3.30 1.28 8.5

RH MICHAEL WACHA
10 3.17 1.18 7.7

RH JOHN LACKEY
13 3.71 1.21 8.1

RH CARLOS MARTINEZ
7 3.56 1.30 8.2

SV ERA WHIP K/9

RH TREVOR ROSENTHAL
37 2.91 1.24 11.6

RH JORDAN WALDEN
1 3.06 1.19 10.9

NEW ACQUISITION ROOKIE (R)

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Mike Matheny has reached the postseason with the Cardinals in each of his first three seasons as manager, but that doesn't mean he can't work on some things. Matheny has shown a notable lack of patience with younger players. He cut the playing time of **Kolten Wong** and **Peter Bourjos** less than a month into the 2014 season and showed little patience for the development of **Carlos Martinez** as a starter. While the Cardinals are a veteran team, they will be integrating a number of young players such as Martinez, lefty **Marco Gonzales** and outfielders **Tommy Pham** and **Stephen Piscotty** over the next few seasons. Matheny, who can best be described as an old-school manager in both demeanor and tactics, has to be able to work those players into his rotation. The medium-market Cardinals will need production from minimum-salaried young players to subsidize their high-priced talent.



Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE PIRATES

They're gonna give St. Louis a run for their money, and they're built to sustain this for years. . . . **Andrew McCutchen** is probably the best player in baseball. He's a very smart player, and he's compact, strong, aggressive, under control. . . . If McCutchen wasn't there, **Starling Marte** would be the everyday centerfielder. He can run, throw, hit for power, play great defense. He's a fastball hitter and has a little trouble recognizing breaking pitches, so he swings early in the count to avoid them. . . . **Gregory Polanco** added 15 pounds of muscle this year. There's a lot of pluses on his card, but he's gonna have to learn to hit the other way against lefthanders and recognize breaking balls. . . . **Francisco Cervelli**'s a definite downgrade from Russell Martin, but who isn't? . . . **Neil Walker** got better last year righthanded. Usually guys have more power righthanded, but he's just the opposite. It was a stay-inside-the-ball, use-the-whole-field approach. He lets it fly a little lefthanded. . . . If you get to a one-game playoff, **Francisco Liriano** could beat you 1-0. But the arm action—you look at it and you say, Yeah, there's a chance for him to get hurt. It's not the best finish, and the delivery's a little bit open. . . . **Gerrit Cole**'s got top-of-the-rotation stuff. The improvement I've seen is the ability to command his fastball and his breaking ball for strikes. His changeup could be better, but that should come with innings and maturity.

LEAGUE
RANK

4

MANAGER **CLINT HURDLE**
5TH SEASON WITH PIRATES

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
3B	JOSH HARRISON					
R-R	.294	.320	.438	10	54	13
LF	STARLING MARTE					
R-R	.284	.342	.453	13	53	34
CF	ANDREW MCCUTCHEN					
R-R	.317	.411	.549	28	91	19
2B	NEIL WALKER					
S-R	.273	.351	.463	22	70	1
RF	GREGORY POLANCO					
L-L	.258	.316	.406	15	67	21
1B	PEDRO ALVAREZ					
L-R	.234	.307	.449	26	76	5
C	FRANCISCO CERVELLI					
S-R	.274	.345	.379	5	39	0
SS	JORDY MERCER					
R-R	.281	.339	.458	15	53	4

BENCH

1B	COREY HART					
R-R	.255	.316	.444	17	49	3
SS	JUNG HO KANG (R)					
R-R	.242	.299	.402	14	48	6
OF	ANDREW LAMBO (R)					
L-L	.258	.308	.409	5	27	2

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
LH	FRANCISCO LIRIANO			
	10	3.58	1.30	9.5
RH	GERRIT COLE			
	15	3.25	1.17	8.4
RH	A.J. BURNETT			
	12	3.79	1.38	7.7
RH	CHARLIE MORTON			
	7	3.64	1.32	6.8
RH	VANCE WORLEY			
	8	3.51	1.30	6.3

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	MARK MELANCON			
	41	2.15	0.94	8.9
LH	TONY WATSON			
	1	2.15	0.99	8.5

NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

ANDREW
MCCUTCHEN



Modest Proposal

Josh Harrison was one of the best stories of 2014, a utility player who hit .315 and moved into an everyday role at third base down the stretch. The narrative, though, shouldn't blind Clint Hurdle to the fact that despite the high batting average, Harrison hasn't changed as a player. He was no better managing the strike zone or making contact than he'd been in the previous three seasons, but he went from batting .289 on contact to batting .374. That kind of jump is most often a fluke when not accompanied by underlying changes in a player's skills. Harrison has enormous roster value; he can play five positions and is good defensively. He has enough speed to pinch-run, and he stole a career-high 18 bases last year. But as an everyday third baseman—and leadoff man, his role this spring—his lack of on-base skills will be a drag on the lineup. The Pirates are better off seeing what Korean import **Jung Ho Kang**, a shortstop by trade, can do at the hot corner.

2015 MLB PREVIEW

NL

CENTRAL

JON
LESTER

CHICAGO
CUBS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE CUBS

I think they're about a .500 team. They could overachieve, but this team has a lot of moving parts, impact prospects like **Kris Bryant**, on their way. They usually don't all get ready at the same time. . . . **Anthony Rizzo** is not as good defensively as some, but he can definitely hit a ball out. He has his best years coming. . . . **Jorge Soler** has the ability to be an All-Star-caliber rightfielder. He can hit for power, he can really throw, he's a sound defender when he wants to be, but he's got to come ready to play. I don't like what appears to be lack of effort. . . . **Starlin Castro** is a quality shortstop, but at times he plays out of control and makes careless errors. . . . **Dexter Fowler** is a placeholder. He does get on base, but he's a streaky hitter, his stolen base percentage is below average, and he's not consistent with his defense. He'll make an ESPN highlight play and then make a poor read on a routine fly ball. . . . Upgrading their catching with **Miguel Montero** and **David Ross** will definitely help. **Welington Castillo** wasn't great defensively and didn't retain the pitch plan. . . . **Jon Lester** is one of the top four or five starters in baseball, a true No. 1. He's a tough guy who pitched through some ailments a couple years ago. . . . The bullpen's a concern. I like **Hector Rondon** better as a setup guy, not so much as a pure closer. **Pedro Strop** is a power guy whose command comes and goes. It'll be real interesting to see if **Jason Motte** can rebound. He did not look good at the end of last year.

LEAGUE
RANK

8

MANAGER **JOE MADDON**
1ST SEASON WITH CUBS

B-T BA OBP SLG HR RBI SB

CF DEXTER FOWLER
S-R .276 .376 .422 12 42 14

SS STARLIN CASTRO
R-R .273 .315 .401 13 63 10

1B ANTHONY RIZZO
L-L .279 .369 .525 35 84 5

RF JORGE SOLER (R)
R-R .269 .324 .474 21 86 1

C MIGUEL MONTERO
L-R .260 .345 .402 14 73 0

2B JAVIER BAEZ
R-R .225 .272 .388 20 64 11

LF CHRIS COGHLAN
L-R .268 .333 .412 6 31 5

3B TOMMY LA STELLA
L-R .278 .357 .370 2 37 4

BENCH

IF ARISMENDY ALCANTARA
S-R .241 .299 .407 11 37 15

3B KRIS BRYANT (R)
R-R .244 .329 .453 26 80 7

OF CHRIS DENORFIA
R-R .260 .317 .365 6 32 10

W ERA WHIP K/9

LH JON LESTER
15 3.27 1.19 8.5

RH JAKE ARRIETA
11 3.18 1.12 9.0

RH JASON HAMMEL
11 3.76 1.23 7.9

RH KYLE HENDRICKS
11 3.24 1.13 6.6

LH TSUYOSHI WADA
11 3.65 1.34 7.5

SV ERA WHIP K/9

RH HECTOR RONDON
35 3.27 1.20 8.5

RH PEDRO STROP
2 2.95 1.16 9.9

NEW ACQUISITION ROOKIE (R)

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Kris Bryant is the best prospect in baseball, a power-hitting third baseman whose spring performance dropped jaws from Goodyear to Tempe. No matter how well he hits, though, the Cubs have to open the season without him. If they stick Bryant on the roster on Opening Day and he succeeds, he can become a free agent at the end of 2019. If they wait just two weeks to promote him, they push back his free agency for an entire season, through '20. The '15 Cubs could still be a ways from contention; Chicago can take a lesson from the Braves, who brought Jason Heyward to the majors on Opening Day '10, then felt they had to trade him last winter rather than lose him after '15 as a free agent. By waiting to promote their young stud, the Cubs are simply trading two weeks of a 23-year-old Bryant for six months of a 28-year-old slugger in his prime.

MILWAUKEE
BREWERS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE BREWERS

They'll fall out of contention this year. . . . Trading Yovani Gallardo weakened the depth of their rotation. **Wily Peralta** has done a really nice job developing, improving his fastball command, but I like him better in the fourth spot than the third. And I would have been more comfortable with **Mike Fiers** and **Jimmy Nelson** competing for fifth starter instead of one being the 4. Nelson has enough velocity, but he's got a high-maintenance delivery and the quality of his secondary stuff suffers. . . . **Jonathan Lucroy** is one of the best catchers in baseball, offensively and defensively, but they have to trust backup **Martin Maldonado**. . . . **Ryan Braun**'s poor season last year was health-related, with the thumb problem. He looked good in BP this spring but took a while to get in sync during games. I think he'll have a solid season, not MVP type, a .270/.340/.470 line and 20-plus homers. . . . **Carlos Gomez** has finally become much more consistent with the quality of his at bats. . . . First base has been an ongoing problem. **Adam Lind** doesn't move like he did four or five years ago—not that he was ever quick, but he's getting slower. He has to give them production. . . . Bringing **Francisco Rodriguez** back as closer was the right move. He's relying more on secondary stuff than ever, but he's still a battler, a competitor. . . . Their bullpen isn't that bad, but they don't have a lot of depth after their top guys. **Will Smith** may take the next step up, but I don't think he'll ever be a closer.

JONATHAN LUCROY



LEAGUE
RANK

10

MANAGER **RON ROENICKE**
5TH SEASON WITH BREWERS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
2B	SCOOTER GENNETT					
L-R	.294	.328	.429	11	54	9
CF	CARLOS GOMEZ					
R-R	.281	.346	.489	24	72	38
C	JONATHAN LUCROY					
R-R	.296	.359	.476	16	67	2
1B	ADAM LIND					
L-L	.283	.338	.453	15	59	0
RF	RYAN BRAUN					
R-R	.278	.341	.472	24	91	14
3B	ARAMIS RAMIREZ					
R-R	.287	.344	.461	18	73	3
LF	KHRIS DAVIS					
R-R	.253	.311	.467	21	66	4
SS	JEAN SEGURA					
R-R	.270	.311	.374	8	41	31
BENCH						
OF	GERARDO PARRA					
L-L	.236	.291	.349	6	27	6
SS	LUIS SARDINAS					
R-R	.252	.288	.327	1	16	8
C	MARTIN MALDONADO					
R-R	.219	.291	.355	5	20	0

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	KYLE LOHSE			
	12	3.36	1.14	6.1
RH	MATT GARZA			
	8	3.73	1.18	6.8
RH	WILY PERALTA			
	14	3.51	1.29	7.7
RH	MIKE FIERS			
	13	3.39	1.14	9.0
RH	JIMMY NELSON			
	9	4.15	1.40	7.7
	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ			
	36	3.25	1.12	9.9
RH	JONATHAN BROXTON			
	3	2.89	1.15	7.5

NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

The Brewers are bringing back most of a rotation that was 12th in the NL in strikeout rate last season and second in fly ball rate. That means **Kyle Lohse**, **Mike Fiers** and their peers are putting a lot of pressure on the defense, especially in the outfield. **Carlos Gomez** is one of the best centerfielders in the game, and **Ryan Braun** is going to play every day in right. In picking a leftfielder, however, manager Ron Roenicke should lean toward getting the best possible defense on the field. That means starting **Gerardo Parra**, acquired last summer from the Diamondbacks, over third-year player **Khris Davis**. Since reaching the majors in 2009, Parra has been one of the five best defensive outfielders in baseball, ranking third in Ultimate Zone Rating and fourth in Defensive Runs Saved. Davis rated as a good leftfielder last year, but Parra is one of the best—and with these pitchers, the Brewers are going to need him.

2015 MLB
PREVIEW

NL

CIN
CENT
LEJOEY
VOTTOCINCINNATI
REDS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE REDS

I like their position players—good defensive team, got speed, got power. But I'm worried about their pitching. . . . **Devin Mesoraco** is a star. He'll probably exceed the 25 homers from last year. . . . I'm a fan of **Billy Hamilton**. I think he can get up to a .330 OBP, and if he does, he'll steal 60 bases. He has the wheels to steal 100, but if he did, he'd probably be one big scab. . . . It's hard to find a prototypical third baseman, a guy who hits 20-plus home runs but isn't so big that he can't field his position. **Todd Frazier** is one of them. I've seen him barrel up pitches I thought were going to hit him. . . . **Jay Bruce** only missed 14 games last year when he had surgery for a torn meniscus. That's not a good idea. He probably said, "I'm O.K.," but he wasn't O.K. That's why the homers were down. . . . This team could lead the league in home runs, even if it looks like **Joey Votto** is still hitting without his legs, which is a problem. . . . **Johnny Cueto** is fabulous. He's able to drop and drive and make the ball come up through the zone, kind of like Tom Seaver did. . . . I'm not sure about the rest of the rotation. **Mike Leake** is good, but he's probably a fourth starter. **Anthony DeSclafani**, he's a No. 5. They need somebody to step up. . . . **Robert Stephenson**, their top prospect, is exactly what you look for, 6' 3", slender, arm works great. I think he'll be up halfway through the year, even though he's only 22. He'll have to be—look at these other pitchers.

LEAGUE
RANK

11

MANAGER **BRYAN PRICE**
2ND SEASON WITH REDS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
CF	BILLY HAMILTON					
S-R	.251	.299	.338	4	46	59
3B	TODD FRAZIER					
R-R	.264	.333	.455	26	93	12
1B	JOEY VOTTO					
L-R	.299	.430	.496	20	71	4
LF	MARLON BYRD					
R-R	.254	.299	.426	22	79	2
RF	JAY BRUCE					
L-L	.239	.311	.480	31	94	8
C	DEVIN MESORACO					
R-R	.257	.331	.463	22	75	0
2B	BRANDON PHILLIPS					
R-R	.266	.309	.375	11	72	3
SS	ZACK COZART					
R-R	.263	.304	.386	9	46	4

BENCH

3B	KRISTOPHER NEGRON					
R-R	.246	.298	.391	8	32	10
C	BRAYAN PEÑA					
S-R	.262	.298	.353	4	24	1
OF	SKIP SCHUMAKER					
L-R	.255	.317	.335	2	27	1

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	JOHNNY CUETO			
14	2.90	1.08	8.6	
RH	HOMER BAILEY			
11	3.61	1.19	7.9	
RH	MIKE LEAKE			
12	3.72	1.26	6.4	
RH	ANTHONY DESCLAFANI (R)			
5	4.12	1.22	7.8	
RH	JASON MARQUIS			
6	4.54	1.50	5.8	
SV	EROLDIS CHAPMAN			
LH	2.05	0.89	16.6	
RH	JUMBO DIAZ			
1	3.21	1.36	8.7	

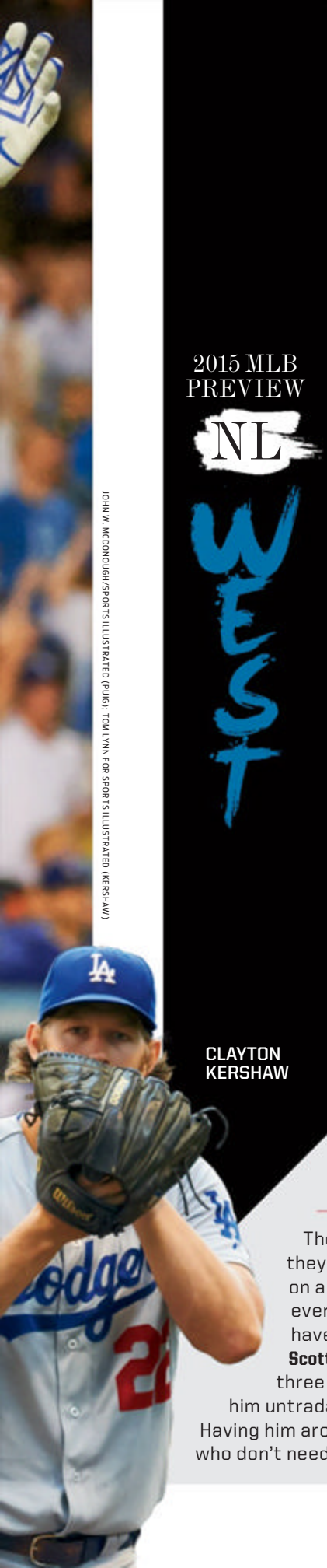
NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Up against payroll restraints, the Reds traded away Mat Latos to free up salary for a hitter, then acquired 37-year-old **Marlon Byrd** from the Phillies. A team desperate for base runners needed to do better than add an aging player who had a .312 OBP last year and who hasn't been above .340 since 2010. Stuck in an increasingly robust division, with a newly thin rotation and a middling offense, it's hard to see the Reds as better than a fringe wild-card contender. It's time to shift gears and plan for the future, and that means trading away impending free agent **Johnny Cueto**. Cueto, 29, had a 2.25 ERA last season and has a 2.48 mark over the past four seasons. He's a No. 1 starter who can swing a division race for a contender, which means the Reds can extract a high price for him—but they should act quickly. Every start Cueto makes chips away at his trade value to a new team and diminishes the potential return.

YASIEL
PUIG





2015 MLB PREVIEW

NL
WEST

CLAYTON
KERSHAW

LOS ANGELES
DODGERS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE DODGERS

You gotta bank on them being the class of the division—they got two guys that can stop a bad streak, **Clayton Kershaw** and **Zack Greinke**. . . .

Yasiel Puig's always gonna be streaky because he'll get overanxious, swing first pitch and all that. But there'll be more power this year—he might hit 25 bombs—and he's gonna do nothing but get better. . . . **Jimmy Rollins** isn't what he used to be, but he's not done yet, either. If he gets his hands on the ball, you're going to be out, and he knows how to position himself. . . . **Joc Pederson** is ready. He's short to the ball, he hits good fastballs, sprays the ball around. There's no reason he shouldn't be in there for Rookie of the Year. . . . **Corey Seager**'s a top prospect. He's a big shortstop—6' 4"—but I think he'll stick there. I don't want to say he's like Cal Ripken, because I don't think that's fair to the kid. . . . Kershaw: great. I don't think his playoff struggles are due to fear or anything. Some people think he tips his pitches—but people say stuff. I'll take my chances with him in October. . . . **Brett Anderson**, man, it's just keeping him on the field. He might have an old body for a young man. He doesn't have smokin' stuff—maybe his curveball is his only big plus—but he can pitch. . . . It's weird, seems like everyone has a great bullpen but the game's richest team. The pen, and who is going to close until **Kenley Jansen** gets back from foot surgery, is a real concern. I do think when they get the big guy back, they'll be fine.

LEAGUE
RANK

2

MANAGER **DON MATTINGLY**
5TH SEASON WITH DODGERS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
SS	JIMMY ROLLINS					
S-R	.247	.320	.380	14	52	26
LF	CARL CRAWFORD					
L-L	.288	.332	.410	7	39	20
RF	YASIEL PUIG					
R-R	.300	.378	.512	23	83	15
1B	ADRIAN GONZALEZ					
L-L	.283	.338	.477	25	111	1
2B	HOWIE KENDRICK					
R-R	.293	.339	.413	10	67	11
C	YASMANI GRANDAL					
S-R	.246	.353	.423	12	47	1
3B	JUAN URIBE					
R-R	.289	.329	.430	9	47	1
CF	JOC PEDERSON (R)					
L-L	.249	.326	.402	18	62	18

BENCH

C	A.J. ELLIS					
R-R	.241	.339	.375	9	41	0
OF	ANDRE ETHIER					
L-L	.260	.343	.415	8	44	2
2B	ALEX GUERRERO					
R-R	.237	.263	.405	16	65	2

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
LH	CLAYTON KERSHAW			
	22	2.06	0.95	9.5
RH	ZACK GREINKE			
	18	2.76	1.13	8.7
LH	HYUN-JIN RYU			
	11	3.26	1.20	7.8
RH	BRANDON MCCARTHY			
	13	3.55	1.15	7.3
LH	BRETT ANDERSON			
	8	3.97	1.27	7.0

	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	KENLEY JANSEN			
	32	2.42	1.04	12.8
LH	J.P. HOWELL			
	0	2.33	1.11	8.2

NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Though the Dodgers traded away one high-priced outfielder this winter in Matt Kemp, they still enter the season with one too many. **Andre Ethier**, 33 in April, has no room to play on a team that has rookie sensation **Joc Pederson** taking over in center, **Yasiel Puig** as an everyday player in right and the even more expensive **Carl Crawford** in left. Ethier doesn't have much value as a platoon bat, either, with two of the starters batting lefthanded.

Scott Van Slyke and **Chris Heisey** are better fits for what the Dodgers need. There are still three years and \$56 million remaining on Ethier's ill-considered contract extension, making him untradable. It's a lot of money to eat, but the Dodgers may have to just release the veteran. Having him around creates a roster crunch that affects the development of both Pederson and Puig, who don't need to think about how Ethier is waiting anytime they go hitless for two straight nights.

SAN FRANCISCO
GIANTS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE GIANTS

Matt Cain has thrown well: He was up to 94 mph, pitched at about 92. The slider was tight. I don't know that he'll be what they once thought, but he can be a middle-of-the-rotation guy. . . . **Madison Bumgarner** is a horse. His early spring was rough, but when the bell rings, he'll be ready. . . . I'm not sold that they'll get a whole lot out of **Tim Lincecum**. His stuff is so-so, mid-80s. The splitter is his out pitch, if he commands it. . . . **Tim Lincecum** probably gets the fifth spot. I think Bruce Bochy saying in February that he expected Lincecum to be in the rotation was a confidence thing for Timmy. He is a bit fragile, let's put it that way. . . . **Yusmeiro Petit** is so valuable because he can throw in multiple roles. His stuff holds up on short rest. . . . I have concerns about **Sergio Romo**. He's so slider-dependent. If he hangs it, it's going to get hit out, and his fastball is often up. . . . **Brandon Belt** is just tapping into his power potential. You watch this guy take batting practice, and he can hit them out there with the big boys. . . . **Joe Panik** is not flashy, but he's solid on both sides of the ball. He's another arrow-up player. . . . **Andrew Susac** is going to be a regular one day. He has arm strength behind the plate. There's some length to his swing, but he has power and keeps getting better. There's a logjam at catcher, but **Buster Posey** could see more days playing first. . . . They're a little suspect in the outfield with **Hunter Pence** hurt. I would try Belt in the outfield. He's athletic enough that it might be an option for him.



MADISON
BUMGARNER

LEAGUE
RANK

6

MANAGER **BRUCE BOCHY**
9TH YEAR WITH GIANTS

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
CF	ANGEL PAGAN					
S-R	.292	.340	.404	5	39	19
2B	JOE PANIK					
L-R	.278	.330	.356	4	46	4
1B	BRANDON BELT					
L-L	.272	.342	.467	19	71	5
C	BUSTER POSEY					
R-R	.308	.373	.484	20	86	0
RF	HUNTER PENCE					
R-R	.275	.332	.445	18	69	12
3B	CASEY MCGEEHEE					
R-R	.261	.326	.354	7	63	2
LF	NORICHIKA AOKI					
L-R	.286	.346	.379	5	42	20
SS	BRANDON CRAWFORD					
L-R	.260	.342	.429	14	68	3

BENCH

3B	JOAQUIN ARIAS					
R-R	.262	.287	.338	1	20	2
OF	GREGOR BLANCO					
L-L	.259	.330	.361	5	36	15
1B	TRAVIS ISHIKAWA					
L-L	.260	.320	.427	4	23	0

Lineup

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
LH	MADISON BUMGARNER			
	17	3.13	1.13	8.4
RH	MATT CAIN			
	8	3.79	1.17	7.5
RH	TIM HUDSON			
	10	3.71	1.22	5.8
RH	JAKE PEAVY			
	9	3.77	1.26	7.4
RH	TIM Lincecum			
	11	4.68	1.38	8.4
	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	SANTIAGO CASTILLA			
	33	2.09	1.07	7.1
RH	SERGIO ROMO			
	3	3.10	0.98	9.2

NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Three years ago **Tim Lincecum** helped push the Giants through the playoffs by allowing one earned run over 13 postseason innings out of the bullpen. Those innings have helped fuel the idea that Lincecum, one of six candidates for five Giants rotation spots, might eventually find a home as a reliever. Yet a look at his troubles doesn't back up that idea. Over the last three years Lincecum has allowed a .270 BA and a .492 SLG in the first inning, with just a 23% strikeout rate and a poor K/BB ratio of 98/58. In his first time through the lineup, usually a pitcher's strongest innings, Lincecum has allowed both a higher OBP and a slightly higher SLG than he did the second time through. He doesn't come into the game breathing fire and then lose his stuff over time; he comes in and struggles, then settles down. That's a recipe for disaster as a reliever, so as long as he can handle a starter's workload, he needs to be in the rotation.



SAN DIEGO
PADRES

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE PADRES

Matt Kemp got strength back in his injured shoulder the second half of last season, and he faced some tough pitching early this spring and was right on it, aggressive. If he hit 30 homers, I wouldn't be that surprised, and though he's not the runner he was, I think he'll steal 15 bags. . . . **Justin Upton** is a special player—strength, power, plays leftfield great—and he's one guy the park won't affect much. He'll strike out (this team will strike out a lot), but if the guy's hitting 25 to 30 homers, you can live with it. . . . I love **Cameron Maybin**. He's a hard worker, but I just don't think he's going to hit enough. In BP he'll hit them 500 feet, but he has big problems recognizing pitches. It's a long swing. He's the best centerfielder they have, runs like a deer, but I don't see them moving, say, **Wil Myers** to first—they'll live with the worse defense. . . . I think **Jedd Gyorko's** going to flourish. His power is legit—he can hit it out to right center in that ballpark, which is an unbelievable feat. . . . When a Red Sox guy is a prospect, all of a sudden he's the second coming, but I never really saw **Will Middlebrooks** do anything. . . . Don't overlook the Padres' starters. When you've got **Ian Kennedy**, a 200-strikeout guy, as your No. 4, that's pretty darn good. **Andrew Cashner** is outstanding, **James Shields** has a track record and **Tyson Ross** made the All-Star team last year. I mean, come on! . . . I have them behind the Dodgers, but they have enough ability to win the division if everything goes right.

2015 MLB
PREVIEW

NL

WEST

MATT
KEMP

LEAGUE
RANK

7

MANAGER **BUD BLACK**
9TH SEASON WITH PADRES

B-T BA OBP SLG HR RBI SB

CF WIL MYERS
R-R .250 .321 .408 20 83 9

RF MATT KEMP
R-R .284 .344 .492 23 79 7

LF JUSTIN UPTON
R-R .262 .342 .471 27 85 9

1B YONDER ALONSO
L-L .262 .320 .384 7 40 5

C DEREK NORRIS
R-R .258 .348 .403 13 59 4

2B JEDD GYORKO
R-R .242 .303 .413 20 72 3

3B YANGERVIS SOLARTE
S-R .269 .333 .411 9 46 1

SS ALEXI AMARISTA
L-R .237 .283 .329 5 36 9

BENCH

OF WILL VENABLE
L-L .246 .304 .397 10 31 12

OF CAMERON MAYBIN
R-R .242 .299 .364 8 38 14

3B WILL MIDDLEBROOKS
R-R .228 .279 .384 14 50 2

W ERA WHIP K/9

RH JAMES SHIELDS
13 3.50 1.24 7.5

RH ANDREW CASHNER
8 2.81 1.14 6.7

RH TYSON ROSS
12 3.18 1.23 8.5

RH IAN KENNEDY
11 3.72 1.28 8.7

RH BRANDON MORROW
3 4.16 1.30 7.9

SV ERA WHIP K/9

RH JOAQUIN BENOIT
28 2.07 0.95 10.3

RH KEVIN QUACKENBUSH
5 1.91 1.14 10.1

NEW ACQUISITION ROOKIE (R)

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
ROTOWIRE.COM

Modest Proposal

Carlos Quentin has been an awkward fit in San Diego since the day the Padres traded for him in 2012. Valuable in the batter's box, Quentin is a disaster in leftfield and unable to stay healthy when he plays out there. In three seasons as a Padre, he has played just 1,350 innings in the field—about one season's worth. Having traded for an entirely new outfield, the Padres no longer need Quentin, who has one year left on a contract extension. With **Cameron Maybin** and **Will Venable** also crowding the bench, the Padres have to find a home, preferably an AL home, for Quentin. The righthanded batter can still rake—.251/.352/.464 those same three years—but he needs to be a full-time DH. Bringing back anything for Quentin will be better than burning a roster spot and \$8 million on a player who will only pinch-hit.



Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE ROCKIES

Everything boils down to **Troy Tulowitzki** and **Carlos Gonzalez**. They both look good swinging the bat. Tulo looks good moving around at shortstop. He seems ready to go. . . . I love **Corey Dickerson**. He's probably got as good a barrel-to-the-ball ability as any young hitter I've seen in a long time. He controls the strike zone very well. Good bat speed. Uses the whole field. His defense is a little bit of another story. . . . **Charlie Blackmon** is probably a little closer to what he was in the second half than the hot start he had last year. He's got a lot of things going on in his hitting approach. . . . **Wilin Rosario** is a guy that they'd like to move for some pitching, just because of the defensive issues. They're going to have a tough time getting him at bats with **Nick Hundley** aboard now. . . . **Tyler Matzek**'s results have been not great early on, but based on last year, I would say he's pretty much assured a spot. The stuff is fine, the command is not. . . . **Kyle Kendrick** looks like he'll give them the innings that they were banking on. . . . **Jon Gray** and **Eddie Butler** have both thrown the ball well. I saw Gray get up to 97. His command was still just fair, but he was featuring really good stuff. Both of them could be a factor at some point this year. I expect Gray a little sooner. He's certainly got their attention the way he's been throwing. . . . **Rex Brothers** has crisper stuff than last year, and his delivery looks like he's got some things ironed out.

LEAGUE
RANK

13

MANAGER **WALT WEISS**
3RD SEASON WITH ROCKIES

B-T	BA	OBP	SLG	HR	RBI	SB
CF	CHARLIE BLACKMON					
L-L	.292	.330	.433	14	57	21
LF	COREY DICKERSON					
L-R	.310	.364	.555	23	78	9
SS	TROY TULOWITZKI					
R-R	.324	.408	.567	27	77	1
RF	CARLOS GONZALEZ					
L-L	.279	.341	.504	23	75	15
3B	NOLAN ARENADO					
R-R	.285	.327	.499	24	81	3
1B	JUSTIN MORNEAU					
L-R	.311	.365	.498	20	79	0
C	NICK HUNDLEY					
R-R	.228	.270	.359	10	36	0
2B	DJ LEMAHTIEU					
R-R	.273	.312	.377	6	34	13

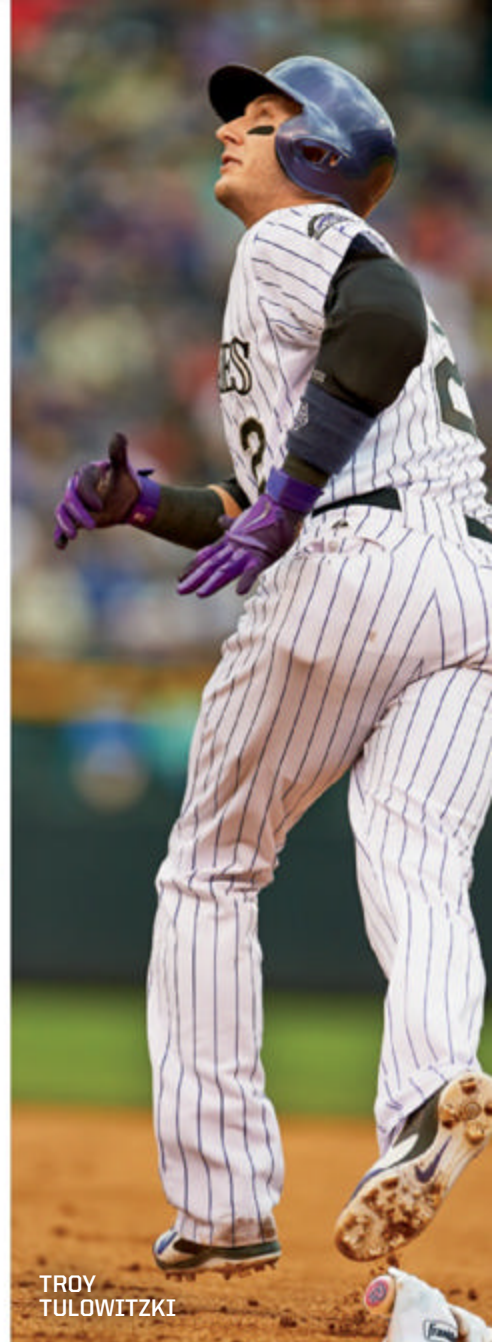
BENCH

OF	DREW STUBBS					
R-R	.255	.312	.410	13	44	18
2B	DANIEL DESCALSO					
L-R	.238	.310	.353	2	24	3
C	WILIN ROSARIO					
R-R	.279	.319	.469	14	52	0

	W	ERA	WHIP	K/9
LH	JORGE DE LA ROSA			
14	3.86	1.29	6.6	
RH	KYLE KENDRICK			
9	4.55	1.37	5.7	
RH	JORDAN LYLES			
8	4.30	1.34	6.2	
LH	TYLER MATZEK			
7	4.15	1.43	7.5	
RH	JON GRAY (R)			
6	4.33	1.26	8.2	
	SV	ERA	WHIP	K/9
RH	LATROY HAWKINS			
25	3.47	1.21	6.0	
RH	ADAM OTTAVINO			
0	3.38	1.32	9.4	

NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**

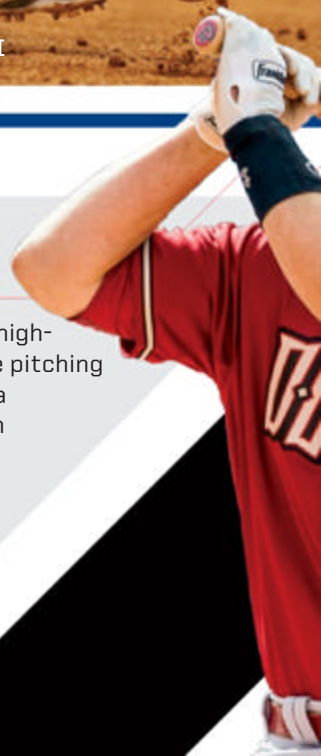
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TROY
TULOWITZKI

Modest Proposal

More than 20 years after the Rockies joined the league, they're still figuring out how to win in a high-altitude environment. Clearly, keeping the ball out of play—striking batters out—is critical for the pitching staff. A batted ball in Coors Field is rough for the defense, given the combination of thin air and a huge outfield. Colorado, however, has ranked 15th, 15th and 14th in the NL the last three years in strikeout rate. Some of that is the environment—breaking balls break less at 5,280 feet—but some of it is personnel. Rockies starters were eighth in the NL in average fastball velocity and 10th in fastball usage. Colorado has to rebuild its staff around power arms who can miss bats with their heat. That means having **Eddie Butler** (93.1 mph) and rookie **Jon Gray** (touched 97 this spring) join **Tyler Matzek** (92.7) in the majors as soon as possible. The Rockies can also lean on newly acquired **Jairo Diaz** (97.2) out of the bullpen.



2015 MLB PREVIEW

NL
WEST

PAUL
GOLDSCHMIDT

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

Enemy Lines

A RIVAL SCOUT SIZES UP THE DIAMONDBACKS

Chip Hale is sharp. He's a high-energy guy. But there are too many ifs in the pitching for them to contend. . . . There's no guarantee that **Yasmany Tomas** will be an everyday third baseman. He's a big-bodied guy—looks to me like he's 270. He's got enough arm, but his accuracy leaves something to be desired. He has power, but I don't see a lot of discipline in his approach. . . . I like **Jake Lamb**; he's going to grow into an above-average defender. Two of the better position-player prospects they have are Lamb and **Brandon Drury**, both third basemen. So why the urgency to play Tomas? . . . Their catching is their biggest issue. **Peter O'Brien** is their prospect—they'd like to get his bat up there as quick as possible, but he's just been fair receiving. One game I saw him in this spring he had throwing issues, overthrowing the pitcher, short-hopping the pitcher. . . . Age is catching up with **Aaron Hill**. He doesn't move as well defensively, doesn't run as well. He's lost a little bat speed. . . . **Jeremy Hellickson** is a fly ball guy, low-90s. If they are hoping for anything more than back-end production from him, they're searching. . . . **Chase Anderson** has a plus changeup. One of his issues last year was home runs, and he's working to add a two-seamer to get more ground balls. . . . I'd say **Trevor Cahill** should be their fifth starter. He's now throwing from a higher slot to create more consistency in his release point, something he worked on with Mike Harkey, the pitching coach, all winter. The results have been promising.

LEAGUE
RANK

14

MANAGER **CHIP HALE**
1ST SEASON WITH DIAMONDBACKS

B-T BA OBP SLG HR RBI SB

CF **A.J. POLLOCK**
R-R .289 .342 .440 10 51 22

LF **DAVID PERALTA**
L-L .268 .304 .416 7 33 5

1B **PAUL GOLDSCHMIDT**
R-R .298 .390 .533 30 108 13

RF **MARK TRUMBO**
R-R .240 .299 .444 28 95 2

3B **YASMANY TOMAS (R)**
R-R .289 .353 .501 17 70 6

2B **AARON HILL**
R-R .268 .319 .408 12 63 5

SS **CHRIS OWINGS**
R-R .269 .297 .386 7 37 9

C **TUFFY GOSEWISCH**
R-R .233 .268 .333 1 9 0

BENCH

OF **ENDER INCIARTE**
L-L .286 .337 .384 5 26 21

3B **JAKE LAMB (R)**
L-R .253 .316 .412 10 42 2

SS **CLIFF PENNINGTON**
S-R .239 .310 .308 2 15 6

W ERA WHIP K/9

RH **JOSH COLLMENTER**
8 3.40 1.16 6.6

RH **JEREMY HELICKSON**
7 4.47 1.35 7.0

RH **CHASE ANDERSON**
9 3.84 1.35 7.5

RH **ALLEN WEBSTER**
9 4.22 1.31 7.8

RH **RUBBY DE LA ROSA**
4 4.31 1.44 7.1

SV ERA WHIP K/9

RH **ADDISON REED**
34 4.14 1.19 9.7

RH **EVAN MARSHALL**
0 3.13 1.41 8.8

NEW ACQUISITION **ROOKIE (R)**

2015 PROJECTED STATISTICS BY
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Modest Proposal

One hundred sixty-nine players across the majors racked up at least 200 innings in the outfield last year. Among them, **Mark Trumbo** was in the bottom 25 in Defensive Runs Saved and UZR/150. Rate him for his entire five-year career and you get similar results, numbers that confirm the eye test: Trumbo can't play the outfield. Nevertheless, the Diamondbacks are going to try him out there again, this time in rightfield. Whatever edge Trumbo's low-OBP power provides he'll give back in outs turned into singles and singles turned into doubles, and that could be particularly damaging to the development of young starters **Rubby De La Rosa**, **Allen Webster** and **Archie Bradley**. Arizona, which has righthanded power in **Paul Goldschmidt** and Cuban import **Yasmany Tomas**, should look to move Trumbo to a team that can play him at first base or DH, and put **Ender Inciarte** in right—a move that would give the Diamondbacks one of the best defensive outfielders in the NL.

More Than Meets the Ear



LIFE IS FULL of beautiful sounds—crashing surf, gospel choirs, ice cream trucks—and sports are an un-scored symphony all their own. Who isn't moved *pocketa-pocketa-pocketa* of a boxer working the speed death rattle of a golf ball as it falls into the cup, the pop of bratwurst on a nine-dollar parking-lot grill?

When Cubs rookie Kris Bryant hits a home run, as he does often, the bat strikes the ball with a distinctive *thwock*. It's the sound of pure contact, baseball's equivalent of perfect pitch, and it has made Bryant the talk of spring training. But then baseball has always held its ambient noises in high esteem. Walter Johnson was the Big Train because his fastball possessed a locomotive roar. Rusty Staub would stand in the outfield with his back to the hitter in batting practice and try to tell which direction the ball was traveling just by listening. Carl Yastrzemski knew if the ball would die or carom off the leftfield wall at Fenway by the sound it made when it hit the Monster.

In this age of analytics, baseball still listens to the sound of its own voice. Even the sophisticated statistics designed to demystify the game look like sounds, at least the ones Batman made when punching out the Penguin. FIP! VORP! BABIP!

Baseball isn't the only sport that's easy on the ears. The early games of March Madness, often played in half-empty arenas, are all squealing sneakers on polished maple. Basketball's most proprietary sound—*swish*—became a word in its own right. Never mind that a football striking a goalpost doesn't make a *doink*: We've persuaded ourselves that it does, in much the way that all Christopher Walken impressions sound more like Walken than Walken ever has.

Not every sound in sports is pleasant. He who enjoys Notre Dame's "Victory March" may not care for Michigan's "The Victors," and vice versa. Many of us could do without the ripping Velcro of a hitter serially adjusting his batting glove between pitches. The grunting, shrieking and wailing in tennis are at odds with a game otherwise attuned to the subtleties of sound. Players who like a *pock* sound when hitting the ball use a little rubber vibration dampener on their racquet face. Players who prefer a *ping* do not.

When Cubs
rookie Kris
Bryant hits
a home run,
as he does
often, fans
and scouts
gush with
**baseball's
highest
praise:**
The ball
just *sounds*
different
off his bat.



What is the best sound in sports?

Join the discussion on Twitter by using **#SIPointAfter** and following **@SteveRushin**

Some sports are only sounds. Fishing is the high zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz of a line being cast, followed by the lower zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz of gentle snoring in a boat. It is possible (though not advisable) to follow the progress of a hockey game while blindfolded. Listen to the *skritch-skratch* of skates on ice; the clicks and clacks of stick on stick, and stick on puck, and puck on plexiglass; the short scrape of a stopping skater abruptly snowing the goalie. If you've ever earwitnessed a team giving a stick-tap salute, you know it sounds like hail on a pressure-treated deck.

When it comes to sound, beauty is in the ear of the beholder (or the beerholder, if you like that little sneeze or sigh the bottle makes when the cap is removed). Me, I like the sound of the Wrigley flags rippling to dead center, the voice of Vin Scully, a perfectly struck driver, children at recess, indecipherable singsong soccer chants and the distant cry of a hot-dog vendor issuing through a bad car radio.

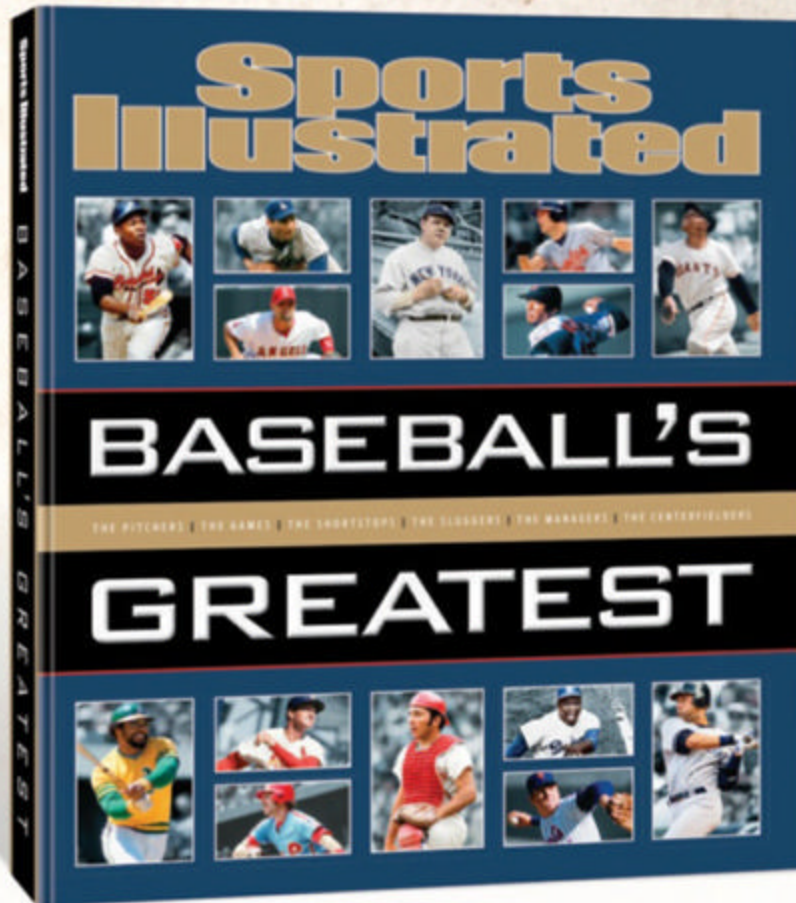
For all the money lavished on sports, it's still a humble whistle that starts March Madness, and a whistle that ends the World Cup. A bell rang to commence the Rumble in the Jungle, and a bell played Secretariat out of the gate at Belmont. All around us, sports are ringing in our ears, thanks to aluminum bat or bullpen telephone or hockey crossbar. And while the biggest events don't need their metaphorical bells and whistles, they still need the bells, and we'll still take the whistles.

Silence can still be the loveliest sound of all, but sports are afraid of it, which is why we get piped-in music and scoreboard exhortations to “Make Some Noise.” And yet nothing is louder than the hush before the big putt on 18, the mortuary silence of the loser’s bus or *Sunday Night Football* briefly muted in midgame, revealing a backing track of crickets and croaking bullfrogs you never even knew were there. □



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